

Flying Snake

A Journal of
Cryptozoology, Folklore and Forteania

October 2024 Volume 10 Number 29 £5.99



**EXCLUSIVE— A SERVAL IN BOLLINGTON
CHESHIRE?**

**Mongolian Lake Monsters . Mystery Cats of East
Cheshire . Crocodiles in Churches . Duck with bolt in
head . Folklore of Bells . Alien Japanese Snakes in Hong
Kong . The Strangeness of Skinwalker Ranch . More!**

FLYING SNAKE SUBSCRIPTION AND GUIDELINES

ESTABLISHED BY RICHARD MUIRHEAD AKA DR DEVO IN 2011

Flying Snake appears about twice a year depending on the time I can find to research for items to include in it and whether or not I have recovered from dancing 'The Poot' at Macclesfield's clubs and pubs. Cover price is £3.99, £ 12 for 3 issues, please send a check for £3.99 etc to Richard Muirhead NOT Flying Snake, to:

112 High St
Macclesfield
SK11 7QQ
UK

I do not accept payments using non UK currencies, bank orders etc.

Co-Editors are Carl Marshall (U.K.) & Mike Hardcastle (Australia)

Back issues available at £3.99 each on request.

Pay Pal payments: richardmuirhead66@outlook.com

For further info on Flying Snake see [https://
www.cosmicpolymath.com/blog](https://www.cosmicpolymath.com/blog)

Contributions on all obscure aspects of cryptozoology, Forteana & folklore welcome at Editor's say-so.

Please contact me for information about back issues and re-producing articles. Money orders and checks not accepted from abroad, please use Google to convert your national currency to pounds sterling. Full colour pdfs of Flying Snake from this issue onwards can be sent to your e-mail inbox at £3.99 per copy.

Essays extolling the occult, racism, sexism will never be considered. Photocopies of previous articles available at author's and my discretion.

Copyright

The basis of this magazine is that I apply the rules of Fair Use. Fair Use or Fair Dealing in the UK is defined on the <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/exceptions-to-copyright> as follows: **Non-commercial research and private study**

You are allowed to copy limited extracts of works when the use is non-commercial research or private study, but you must be genuinely studying (like you would if you were taking a college course). Such use is only permitted when it is 'fair dealing' and copying the whole work would not generally be considered fair dealing.

The purpose of this exception is to allow students and researchers to make limited copies of all types of copyright works for non-commercial research or private study. In assessing whether your use of the work is permitted or not you must assess if there is any financial impact on the copyright owner because of your use. Where the impact is not significant, the use may be acceptable.

If your use is for non-commercial research you must ensure that the work you reproduce is supported by a sufficient acknowledgement. **Fair dealing**

Certain exceptions only apply if the use of the work is a 'fair dealing'. For example, the exceptions relating to research and private study, criticism or review, or news reporting. Fair dealing' is a legal term used to establish whether a use of copyright material is lawful or whether it infringes copyright. There is no statutory definition of fair dealing - it will always be a matter of fact, degree and impression in each case. The question to be asked is: how would a fair-minded and honest person have dealt with the work? Factors that have been identified by the courts as relevant in determining whether a particular dealing with a work is fair include: does using the work affect the market for the original work? If a use of a work acts as a substitute for it, causing the owner to lose revenue, then it is not likely to

Be fair. Is the amount of the work taken reasonable and appropriate? Was it necessary to use the amount that was taken? Usually only a part of a work may be used. The relative importance of any one factor will vary according to the case in hand and the type of dealing in question.

CONTENTS

DR DEVO`S DIARY 5

WHALES, DRAGONS AND CROCODILES IN CHURCHES ULRICH
MAGIN 6 - 13

THE STRANGENESS OF SKINWALKER RANCH R. MUIRHEAD
AND S. LEA 14 - 23

THE UKRAINIAN DEADLY SCORPION ULRICH MAGIN 24 - 28

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FORTHEAN KIND PAUL SCREETON
29 - 37

MYSTERY CATS OF EAST CHESHIRE RICHARD MUIRHEAD 38 -
40

THE GRUESOME GBAHALI—LURKING IN LIBERIA? PART ONE
DR KARL SHUKER 41-48

VISITORS FROM THE ICE AGE WORLD GREG BRICK, PHD 49-51

BEALINGS BELLS LOES MODDERMAN 52-55

ON THE IDENTITY OF LARGE BIRDS OF PREY REPORTED IN
NEW ZEALAND PART TWO LANA THILO 56-60

DID THE JAPANESE RELEASE THEIR POISONOUS SNAKES IN-
TO BRITISH HONG KONG? RICHARD MUIRHEAD 61- 64

THE MYSTERY OF HOLLOWCOMBE BOTTOM: A DARTMOOR
ENIGMA MARC RAINES 65-66

MONGOLIAN LAKE MONSTERS TABITCA COPE 67-71

NOTES & QUERIES 72-77

ART BY LOES MODDERMAN 78 - 80

DR DEVO`S DIARY

*“ For I pray God for the introduction of new creatures into this island. For I pray God for the ostriches of Salisbury Plain, the beavers of the Medway and silver fish of Thames.” Christopher Smart`
`Rejoice in the Lamb. `*

Welcome to another edition of your favourite obscure collection of cryptozoology, Forteana and folklore that is Flying Snake. In this issue I have collaborated again with Shane Lea from the U.S.A., this time on the notorious hot spot of weird paranormal activities in the form of Skinwalker Ranch in Utah. I do not pretend to understand why or what is going on there except to suggest it must have been the sight of some serious dabbling in the occult by persons unknown to Shane or I. Like many occurrences of high strangeness the exact cause gets lost in a plethora of anecdotes of a great degree of excitement and the exact origin of the phenomena is seriously obscured. Ulrich Magin is back with his look at whales, dragons and crocodiles in churches and also he provides a look at a cryptid in the form of an Ukrainian deadly scorpion. Loes Modderman offers an account of seemingly haunted bells at Bealings House at Great Bealings in Suffolk and I feature some of her excellent art work towards the back of this issue. Karl Shuker`s fascinating look at the cryptid known as the Gbahali from Liberia is featured but this is a long piece so I have decided to publish it in two parts, part two will appear in Flying Snake # 30 next year. I also feature Dr Greg Brick`s essay Visitors from the Ice Age World concerning life in Carver`s Cave, Minnesota, particularly the blind cray fish. I contribute a few articles of my own in this issue of Flying Snake, specifically on the mystery cats of East Cheshire, where my home town of Macclesfield happens to be located. I include part two of Lana Thilo`s look at the identity of large birds of prey reported from New Zealand and also I include regular Facebook friend contributor Marc Raine`s piece on the mystery of Hollowcombe Bottom in Devon.

Whales, Dragons and Crocodiles in Churches

Ulrich Magin

In the past, curious finds from natural history such as whale bones and mummified crocodiles were exhibited in many churches and other public buildings in Europe. These established a kind of identity with the region – either as proof that some local knight had killed a dragon in long-gone days, or as a proudly exhibited indication of wealth (some cities in Germany imported whale bones from the Netherlands as spectacular exhibits).



1. (Above left) Whale ribs in Maria im Kapitol, Cologne. (photo: Ulrich Magin)

2. (Above right) Whale ribs outside the church at Sorrento, Italy. (photo: Ulrich Magin)

3. Whale bones in the City Hall of Haarlem (see following page top centre) in the Netherlands. (photo: Ulrich Magin)

4. Portrait of a hippocampus on the campanile of Santa Maria Asunta in Positano. (Following page photo: Ulrich Magin)



Whales

Several churches are home to whale ribs. In the church of Maria im Kapitol, Cologne, Germany, the visitor can see several whale bones which may be from a fossil specimen encountered in ground of the city. At the church of Sant'Antonio in Sorrento, close to Naples, Italy, the bones are presented outside, near the entrance to the building. In some instances, such as the church of Santa Maria Asunta in Positano, at the Amalfi Coast, Italy, an image has to do – a giant classical ancient water horse adorns the campanile of the major church.

In the Netherlands, whale bones are sometimes exhibited in the town hall, such as at Haarlem. In Verona, a whale rib hangs below L'Arco della Costa, one of the gates leading to the main Piazza delle Erbe.

Dragons and Mermaids

In addition to whales, dragons were sometimes shown in churches. Whale bones were sometimes identified as the remains of saints and sometimes as those of dragons. And then there was the creature that hang from the ceiling of Admont Priory in Upper Styria in Austria which was lost in the fire of 1865. Before, some expert had identified it as a fossil ichthyosaur. (Dalla Torre; Doblhoff, p. 145)

In 1850 the church Madonna di Campiglio still housed a dragon's skull which hang from the ceiling on a chain, together with an egg of the same dragon. Both were thrown away during a renovation of the church late in the 19th century. The dragon was said to have come from nearby Lake Nambino where he was feared as a devourer of sheep, goats, lambs, and – at least once – a shepherd. He was allegedly shot with a gun by a hunter from Sulzbach.

A mummified shark hangs over the Martinstor city gate in Bregenz, Austria, on the banks of Lake Constance. Local tradition says this is a mermaid which was caught in the lake in the 13th century, and it is regarded as the protective spirit of the city. Dr Deny Tucker of the British Museum identified the remains as those of *Lamna nasus*, a porbeagle shark, an animal certainly not native to the lake. How it got there is anybody's guess. The identification is given in "Shadows in the sea: the sharks skates and rays" by Harold W. McCormick, Tom Allen and William E. Young (p. 150).

Crocodiles

However, mummified crocodiles were the animals most often displayed. And not only in churches, but in public buildings and apothecary stores as well. In churches, they were often a memorial for some local knight who had taken part in the crusades, or they were identified with a dragon killed by some knight. In apothecaries, they may have signified poisons and exotic lands from where powerful medicine was thought to have come from.

The pharmacy crocodile has a long tradition. William Shakespeare, in “Romeo and Juliet” (Act V), talks about such a mummy. Romeo says (*italics mine*):

Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight.
Let's see for means. O mischief thou art swift
To enter in the thoughts of desperate men.
I do remember an apothecary, –
And hereabouts he dwells, – which late I noted
In tatter'd weeds, with overwhelming brows,
Culling of simples, meagre were his looks,
Sharp misery had worn him to the bones;
And in his needy shop a tortoise hung,
An *alligator stuff'd*, and other skins
Of ill-shaped fishes; and about his shelves
A beggarly account of empty boxes,
Green earthen pots, bladders, and musty seeds,
Remnants of packthread, and old cakes of roses
Were thinly scatter'd, to make up a show.
Noting this penury, to myself I said,
And if a man did need a poison now,
Whose sale is present death in Mantua,
Here lives a caitiff wretch would sell it him.
O, this same thought did but forerun my need,
And this same needy man must sell it me.
As I remember, this should be the house.
Being holiday, the beggar's shop is shut.
What, ho! Apothecary!

Below: **The crocodile in Santa Maria Vergine delle Grazie in Cur** Shakespeare's apothecary lives in Mantua, in Upper Italy, near Lake Garda, and Upper Italy is the place where we encounter most crocodiles exhibited in churches.



5. The crocodile high on the pillar at the Piazza San Marco. (photo: Ulrich Magin)

At Mantua, in the church Santa Maria Vergine delle Grazie (1399–1406) in Curtatone, a crocodile mummy is on display. It was allegedly caught around 1500 in the reeds of the river Mincio (Cordier, p. 92; Centini, p. 26; Neuteboom; Schenda, p. 182).

And in Verona – the site where “Romeo and Juliet” plays – a crocodile is also on display: in the Santuario di Santa Maria della Pace of San Michele Extra, at the foot of Mount Valpolicella. It is a mummified, 5 meter long Nile crocodile which was probably donated to the church in 1608 by the wealthy Pier Paolo Malaspina. According to legend, it was caught in the Adige River after eating several people (Allegri; Cordier, p. 46).

Carlo Amoretti reports, in 1814, a stuffed crocodile on display in the church of St Mary on the Sacro Monte near Varese which was said to have been caught in a valley near Lago Maggiore between Breno and Lugano. (Centini, p. 26–27; Castiglioni, p. 6) In 1865 it was reported that a crocodile mummy was also displayed in the church Santa Marta, a suburb of Como. It was later housed in the city's library, but then its trace is lost. (Castiglioni, p. 6)

Legend has it that there was, a few hundred years ago, another large lake in Upper Italy, the Lago Gerundio near Milan

(which had actually been an massive swamp in medieval times). The lake was thought to have been full of dragons, and in Almenno San Salvatore near Bergamo, a 2.6 meter long rib is shown in the church of San Giorgio. It is said to come from a monster that was caught in the Brembo River. The perfectly preserved, over three meter long crocodile that hangs from the ceiling in the church of Santa Maria Annunziata near Ponte Nossa, northeast of Bergamo, is said to have come from the Serio River. It was first mentioned in a document in 1594 (Cordier. p. 46; Neuteboom; Centini, pp. 26–28).

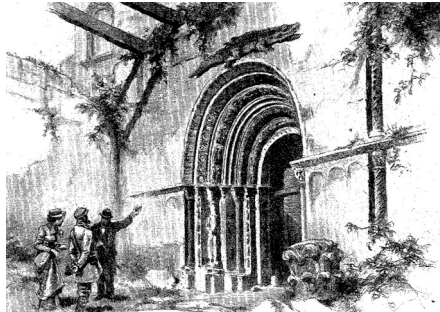
Venice has numerous depictions of dragons, such as sculptures of dragons and a dolphin on the walls of the church tower of the Campo di Santa Margherita (Rob, p. 103), but the most interesting dragon is a “mysterious” crocodile on the top of the column Colonna di Todoro in the Piazzetta, which accompanies a statue of St. Theodor. (Rob, p. 19) Nobody knows why a crocodile is depicted here but it certainly stands in for a dragon.

More southern Italy also has some specimens. In the Convento di Santa Fiora in Tuscany we find the preserved remains of a lake monster, which recent analysis found out was the cranium of a Nile crocodile (*La Stampa*, 16 December 2002, p. 3)

And in 2004, the skeleton of a crocodile was discovered during an excavation for the new metro at Naples, Italy. There were legends about such a crocodile in the 12th century castle but it had become lost. (Cordier, p. 145; *Corriere della Sera*, 21 March 2004, p. 1 & 18). “Numerous remains of crocodiles” were said to be housed in the Cathedral of Ragusa in Sicily indicating that the region was once infested by these reptiles – something hard to believe. (Cordier, p. 151) But Sicily had close ties with northern Africa. In modern times, Sicily has been a hot-spot of sightings of tazelwurm-like monsters. Spain holds several additional examples. There is a crocodile exhibited in the cathedral of Seville, in Andalusia, first mentioned 1694. (*ABC*, Seville, 24 March 1954, p. 12, and 5 July 1983) A “giant lizard” that was allegedly caught in a well of the city of Jaén is remembered by a monument in the Santo Domingo Street in the quarter of La Magdalena. It looks like a crocodile and I dimply recall that as such it had been exhibited in the Cathedral. (*ABC*, Madrid, 11 August 1962)

And at Barros, in the Spanish desert region of Extremadura, a mummified caiman hangs at the portal of the church of San Miguel de los Angeles. It is assumed the animal was collected by Hernando de Soto on

the Mississippi who donated it to the Franciscan friars. Legend, however, claims it is a dragon killed near the town. (*Blanco y negro*, 2 July 1904, S. 2)



Explanations

As a cryptozoologist, you may assume that the crocodiles which acted as dragons in Italian churches indicate an unknown species of large lizard. However, wherever a crocodile has been preserved and analysed, it has turned out to be a Nile Crocodile. “Many legends, which were later localized, report on dragon conquerors, dragon slayers and dragon fights,” writes the folklorist Hans Schöpf (p. 34). “Local legends emerge from older general ideas, with sometimes unknown or even unnamed dragon fighters as heroes.

These local legends are also often linked to crocodile skins, which were donated by crusaders or merchants as ‘curiosa’ to churches, town halls or high-ranking personalities, just as the Crusades in general revived the belief in dragons.”

Other crocodiles arrived with fairs: Schenda (p. 181) reports on a Nile crocodile captured in Egypt, which was exhibited in 1564 in Strasbourg, Antwerp, Ingolstadt, Rostock and other cities in Europe. It was caught by a Hieronymus Mantaner, possibly a man from Mantua, which links to the northern Italian tradition.

Also, crocodiles as show exhibits in medicine shops were not unknown in the rest of Europe. In Fulda, Hesse, Germany, an old pharmacy in the Karlstraße 31 is called “Krokodil” (crocodile) and mimics an Egyptian building with hieroglyphs on the front!

Bibliography

Castiglioni, Giorgio (2002): Sulle tracce del serpente con le zampe. *Studi della biblioteca comunale di Moltrasio*, 2, p. 4–21.

Centini, Massimo & Rangoni, Laura (2001): *Lombardia misteriosa*. Macchione: Azaate.

Cordier, Umberto (1986): *Guida ai draghi e mostri in Italia*. Milano: SugarCo.

Dalla Torre, K. W. von (1887): Die Drachensage in Alpengebiet. *Zeitschrift des Deutschen und Österreichischen Alpenvereins*. Munich, p. 208–226.

Doblhoff, Josef Frh. v. (1895): Altes und Neues vom „Tatzelwurm“, mit einem Schlussworte über vergleichende Sagenforschung in Österreich-Ungarn. *Zeitschrift für Österreichische Volkskunde*, p. 140–164.

McCormick, Harold W., Allen, Tom, and Young, William E. (1963): *Shadows in the sea: The sharks skates and rays*. Philadelphia: Chilton.

Neuteboom, Henry (2003): In search of an ocean. <http://portal.hellomilano.it/article.php?sid=857>

Rob, Gerda (2004): *Venedig*. Munich: ADAC.

Schenda, Rudolf (1995): *Das ABC der Tiere*. Munich: C. H. Beck.

Schöpf, Hans (1992): *Fabeltiere*. Wiesbaden: VMA.

The Strangeness of Skinwalker Ranch

Shane Lea and Richard Muirhead

In this issue of Flying Snake Shane and I are looking at the very strange events that have been reported from Skinwalker Ranch in Utah over many years, particularly those events which pertain to the more paranormal aspects of cryptozoology. This is controversial even within the boundaries of cryptozoologists because some members of this discipline want to keep cryptozoology purely within the area of flesh and blood animals and avoid the more paranormal elements entirely. However it cannot be denied that in certain environments animals do occur which defy our current level of scientific understanding. In this essay though, I (Richard,) want to place the cryptozoology of the Ranch in the context of the wider cryptozoology of Utah. According to Wikipedia: “In Navajo culture, a **skin-walker** (Navajo: *yee naaldlooshii*) is a type of harmful witch who has the ability to turn into, possess, or disguise themselves as an animal. The term is never used for healers. The *yee naaldlooshii*, translating to "by means of it, it goes on all fours," is one of several types of skin-walkers within Navajo beliefs. These witches are seen as the antithesis of Navajo values, performing malevolent ceremonies and using manipulative magic in stark contrast to the beneficial works of medicine people.

The legend of skin-walkers is deeply embedded in Navajo tradition and rarely discussed with outsiders. This reticence is partly due to cultural taboos and the lack of contextual understanding by non-Navajos. Stories often depict skin-walkers using their powers for evil, and they are considered a source of fear and mystery within Navajo communities. “Traditional accounts describe them as powerful sorcerers who, after engaging in various nefarious acts, gain the ability to transform into animals at will.” (1). Skinwalker Ranch (formerly Sherman Ranch) is located in west Uintah County, south-east of Ballard, Utah, over an area of 512 acres. UFO reports date back over a fifty year period on the ranch. (2). Perhaps the most prominent animal-mystery element on the Ranch is cattle mutilations and cattle disappearances. Cattle mutilations worldwide tend to be associated with UFOs or strange lights. Cattle mutilations have been mentioned in the folklore of the area for decades. Cattle have also mysteriously vanished from the ranch. According

to the book 'Hunt for the Skinwalker Science Confronts the Unexplained at a Remote Ranch in Utah' by Kelleher and Knapp: "...Along with the aerial displays by UFOs have come more frightening intrusions. Beginning in the 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, local ranchers reported the bizarre mutilations of their cattle. Similar mutilations have been reported in other parts of the world. The motives and methods of the mutilators, none of whom have ever been caught in the act, remain a complete mystery. Hicks says he has personal knowledge of twelve to fifteen mutilation cases." (3) (Junior Hicks is the area's unofficial UFO historian.) In April 1995 Tom and Tad Gorman found one of their heifer's in a canal "lying motionless, and her entire rear end had been carved out with what looked like an extremely sharp instrument...The cut was flawless. It looked as if a six-inch diameter, perfectly circular saw with a sucking device had jammed into the heifer's rear end and effortlessly sucked out the entire insides of the animal without any loss of blood..." (4.) Other cryptids at Skinwalker Ranch include Bigfoot type creatures. The Gorman family witnessed these on the Ranch on several occasions. Native Americans in the north-west of the USA see the Bigfoot or Sasquatch as a spirit and a real being. "A security officer familiar with the Ranch, Brandon Ware (not his real name) believes that skinwalkers and Bigfoot are separate entities, "skinwalkers are smaller." (5) Bigfoot animals have also been seen in the vicinity of animal mutilation cases. In 1974, when a wave of cattle mutilations occurred in Nebraska, Kansas and Iowa, witnesses reported seeing strange lights in the sky and animals that resembled apes or bears on ranches where mutilations occurred. " (6) Some people have a sense of dread when witnessing Bigfoot. In October 1975, on a remote ranch in Colorado there were a series of events similar to those that were to take place later at Skinwalker Ranch. The teenage sons of a family that owned the ranch came across a mutilated cow; they also spotted huge footprints that they learned had come from a Bigfoot-type creature that had been spotted on the ranch.

Since 1999 a red hyena-like creature has been seen on Skinwalker Ranch, along with huge spiders and tiny bright red birds. The red hyena-like animal has been described as “ low to the ground, heavily muscled, weighing perhaps 200 pounds, with curly red hair and a bushy tail.” (7) It was attacking one of the horses on the Ranch. This activity all sounds like the workings of the Trickster, a Fortean or mythological concept: “Tricksters are among the most entertaining characters in world mythology. Usually male, they delight in breaking rules, boasting, and playing tricks on both humans and gods. Most tricksters are shape-changers who can take any form, though they often appear as animals. Tricksters play a prominent role in African and Native American mythologies. They can also be found in the myths of Europeans, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and the Aborigines of Australia. Many gods, demigods, and heroes from around the world are described as having trickster qualities.” (8) According to Fortean Times # 169 ‘Strangeness at Skinwalker Ranch ’ by Ian Simmons p. 45, three toed and clawed footprint were found on the Ranch by a tree, resembling the footprint of a velociraptor. A post on the Skinwalker Ranch Facebook group by J.H in mid-July 2024 suggested a dragon had been seen on the Ranch and this may refer to the velociraptor I mentioned above. Other posts suggested dire wolves had been seen on the Ranch. Wild dogs are reported to have attacked a lama.

One of the most notorious incidents at the Ranch involved the appearance of a huge wolf in 1994 whose body reached about chest height of the couple who first witnessed it, Tom Gorman and his wife , Ellen. It was almost three times the height of any wolf Tom had ever seen and behaved in a manner that suggested it was tame. After grabbing a calf’s throat through the bars of a corral the wolf was pummelled with kicks , a baseball bat and finally shot several times at point-blank range with a Colt Magnum but this made almost no impact whatsoever upon the “wolf” which eventually slowly and silently retreated into some woods. Obviously this is not the outcome one would expect if this were a normal “flesh and blood” wolf. The whole incident left the

Gorman family totally shocked and fearful. Perhaps the most bizarre sighting on the Ranch was of two dog-men, smoking cigarettes! This was reported on May 9th, 2018 on the Gaia website. The two humanoids were spotted on the side of the road wearing trench coats. Personally I (Richard) think they were probably mis-identified humans. Utah beyond the Ranch is rich in cryptids. There are phantom kangaroos, giant snakes, lake monsters such as the Bear Lake monster and invasive species such as a pacu (similar to a piranha) caught in Utah Lake, and piranha found in the Jordan River and Decker Lake. (It should be pointed out that the Sherman and the Gorman family who own the Ranch are both mentioned. Shane suggests we identify the Shermans as the actual owners.) Other Utah cryptids include the deadly “water babies” which, rather like the sirens in the ancient Mediterranean, lure humans to their death in places such as the White River and Provo River. Mormon pioneers heard about the water babies from the Ute people in the Great Basin of south-west Utah. Giant snakes were thought to inhabit the Bottle Hollow man-made reservoir adjacent to Skinwalker Ranch and a serpent-like creature was said to inhabit Moon Lake at the southern end of Uinta at an elevation of 8,300 ft. Panguitch Lake in the Dixie National Forest was said to be inhabited by a “big fish.” In fact the lake’s name comes from a Paiute word that means “big fish.” Camel or camel-like creatures may have survived much later than conventional zoology allows in parts of Utah. In 1926 a skull of such a camel was found in Fillmore, Utah. Some pictographs in Utah suggest the mammoth or mastodon survived much later than is normally expected in Utah, as do pictographs of flying, pterodactyl-like creatures. There are reports of miniature T.Rex-like dinosaurs still living around southern Utah. In 1987 a truck driver heading towards the border with Wyoming saw a pre-historic cat like a saber-tooth tiger or lion.



Wikipedia. Map of the United States with Utah highlighted. By TUBS - This SVG locator map includes elements from this locator map:, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15949629>

Shane adds: The Most Paranormal Place On Earth?

Let's take a walk on the wild side.

Skinwalker Ranch is a 480-acre ranch in the north-eastern part of the American state of Utah. It is a veritable hotbed of anomalous activity. A wide range of paranormal and occult (hidden) phenomena has been reported here. Everything from UAP's- unidentified arial phenomena (UFO's), to dimensional windows, poltergeists, Sasquatch-like cryptids to dire wolves have been experienced in this area.

The surrounding area has a long history of unexplained events, dating back to the Amerindian Ute tribe and their living history in the area. Some of this history involves a bizzare, occult entity known as a Skinwalker. Skinwalkers are allegedly male or female Amerindian witches that are very malevolent and possess the ability to shape-shift into different types of animals, such as coyotes, wolves, cats, rabbits, or even mountain lions. Skinwalkers allegedly use witchcraft or raw magic to carry out nefarious, heinous deeds. According to Navajo medicine men, Skinwalkers acquire their powers and transformative abilities by going through a horrid, cannibalistic, initiation process in which an

associate is actually murdered!!! Then the flesh of the deceased is consumed and the victim's blood is drank while the heart is still beating!! Wow!! Stephen King and Edgar Alan Poe eat your heart out! Pun intended. According to the Navajo people, Skinwalkers (and their gruesome initiation rites) account for many abductions and disappearances of tribal members. Sometimes the tables are turned and the Skinwalker is the victim. The Navajo Nation has it's own justice system for dealing with cases of Skinwalkers. In the case files of the Easton Collection Center of northern Arizona, there is a case file from July 16, 2018, called State vs. Cales. The case deals with a man whose defense was that a woman was a Skinwalker, that was casting spells and tormenting him, so he killed her! Wow! Crazy!!

An actual police record exists, documenting an encounter two tribal police officers had during an altercation with an alleged Skinwalker, on Highway 264, within Navajo tribal lands, in northern Arizona. The two officers approached someone that was said by a telephone-caller to be a Skinwalker. As the two officers approached the "man" that was walking alongside of the highway on two legs, the "man" let out an animal howl and then proceeded to lope off on 4 legs, at speeds of up to 50 miles an hour! No human (normal human?) could possibly attain such a speed. Amerindians wearing animal skins with a Gray Wolf or Coyote skull still attached are a possibility, especially when seen at night or during low light conditions. If someone was seen at night with a werewolf/Skinwalker silhouette, that in and of itself, would probably put the fear of God into you! Is anyone going to go up and ask him/her for their id.? I think not! Could a shape-shifting Skinwalker be responsible for some of the different animals seen on Skinwalker Ranch, such as dire wolves (more on this later)? Are they responsible for cattle mutilations on the ranch? Maybe. To some, it is an explanation. Nevertheless, it is all too easy to lump everything together and say that a Skinwalker is responsible for all the anomalies here or that all the anomalies are from another dimension. Then you have a faux-pas, where you are explaining a hypothetical with a hypothetical. Many times disparate phenomena are experienced to a certain degree, that on the surface look related, but, may in fact be totally different and separate phenomena.

Let's just take for example, lake monsters. No-one, not even a die-hard Cryptozoologist would say that a true flesh-and-blood, undocumented animal, HAS to account for EVERY lake monster sighting. Pragmatically speaking, you almost always have a varied assortment of phe-

nomena to account for lake monsters- floating logs, aquatic birds, large (known) fish, and maybe, just maybe, a true cryptid. Sometimes, even unrelated UAP phenomena are reported with lake monsters- again, comprising another entirely different, widely assorted, mixed-bag of phenomena and explanations. It is much easier with lake monsters to say that the logs, birds, etc. are all from another dimension. Come on, now! You get the picture. Yes, it's complicated, but if these things were that easy to figure out, they wouldn't be unexplained in the first place! ALL anomalous phenomena is a mixed-bag of anomalies that many times are lumped together. The Crypto-zoologist's or Fortean's job is to sort out all the varied phenomena to determine what is a known phenomenon and what is an unknown. Hence, what is avant-garde and what is prosaic.

That having been said, the very concept of String Theory or of multiple universes is a legitimate, scientific and fascinating topic, that is very much in fashion with theoretical physicists. Granted, it would take a tremendous amount of energy to create a space/time disruption in the fabric of space so that one could and/or would, be able to travel inter-dimensionally into another universe. This energy could be created artificially, but probably would not occur naturally very often in nature, or else there would be windows and holes in the fabric of space, everywhere! One particularly interesting multi-universe theory holds that there are essentially many parallel universes, very much like ours, but just slightly different. In other words, there might be a dozen different universes, that each contain a Richard Muirhead, a Karl Shuker and a Jon Downes. Imagine that! But, each Jon Downes would be slightly different from the one we know. In one universe, Jon Downes could have made slightly different life choices so that he is equivalent to the Beatles! John, Paul, George, and Jon? Yes! Of course, each and every Jon Downes in every parallel universe it goes without saying, would have long hair and a beard! Just kidding about that, Jon! 3 cheers to you!

The whole concept of multiple versions of ourselves and parallel universes is beyond fascinating! Could there ever be contact between parallel universes? Who knows? Remember, it is only a theory, but a very pensive and contemplative one. Could a parallel universe explain any of the vast array of phenomena seen at Skinwalker Ranch? It's possible, but not probable at this point. The phenomena is still real though, even if we can't explain all of it. That's where the fun comes in.

Skinwalkers are said to frequent the area around Skinwalker Ranch-hence it's name. This is according to the Ute Amerindian tribe. The Ute's essentially shunned the Skinwalker Ranch because of their fear and loathing of Skinwalkers and the other UAP activity known to frequent the ranch.

When considering the subject of UAP's (all apologies to ET), the U. S. military should always be the prime suspect. The western United States with it's lower population, open terrain and sprawling landscape, is perfect for military aircraft flyovers, from nearby air bases. Covert military and black-ops aircraft, triangular in design, have long been known to have been tested in western U. S. airspaces. These top-secret military aircraft may very well account for the vast majority of UAP phenomena that fall into that category, including some unexplained, flying objects observed at Skinwalker Ranch.

Seemingly intelligently-controlled orbs of light fall into another category and are totally different from most other UAP phenomena. Could earthquakes and/or seismic activity account for some of the anomalous balls of light seen on Skinwalker Ranch? Quartz deposits can cause plasma balls to form in the atmosphere. It is a distinct possibility.

Another explanation for the glowing orbs seen at Skinwalker Ranch is a real phenomenon known as Fata Morgana, where a temperature inversion involving a layer of warm air trapped near the ground by a layer of cold air, causes light to be refracted due to a lens effect. The light source that is refracted due to the lens effect can even be from several miles distant- such as car headlights, etc. The light that is refracted can sometimes take on the appearance of glowing balls of light, or orbs, if you will.

The stream on Skinwalker Ranch may contain underwater, decomposing, plant material that releases gases, that will rise to the surface of the stream and spontaneously combust, when they come in contact with oxygen. This can cause flashes of light, or glowing orbs, such as the ones seen and photographed in West Bengal, India, known as the Aleya Lights. Nevertheless, even all these explanations cannot account for all orbs and especially seemingly intelligently-controlled orbs.

Orbs are far out and remain unexplained, despite establishment science's best efforts. A certain number of Skinwalker Ranch cattle mutilations have occurred, where the ears of cattle were sliced off neatly (as if by carnassial or the cutting teeth of a predator) and certain internal organs had been removed. Several of these mutilations happened in broad daylight, and within a short window of opportunity, time-wise,

, to previous Skinwalker Ranch owner Terry Sherman's Angus cattle, when he owned and operated Skinwalker Ranch. Could a mystery predator, such as a Dire Wolf, move in on prey within minutes of the cattle having been seen alive? Predators favour certain prized internal organs, such as the liver. Seemingly, only a fast-moving, aggressive, super-predator such as a Dire Wolf would have the strength, fearlessness and ability to take down and partially consume such large prey, in such a fashion and in broad daylight! Cattle predations are still being found to this day. A recent cattle mutilation on Skinwalker Ranch (2024) was examined by biologist Ben Woodruff of Utah's Hutchings Institute. He determined that the tooth-marks on a cow's rib bones and scapula were made by a predator larger than a Gray Wolf! He also ruled out all other known predators as the culprit and specifically mentioned a Dire Wolf as the animal that most closely matched its dentition with the tooth-marks on the cow's remains! Yes, a Dire-Wolf! Figure that! Dire wolves were Pleistocene mammals, larger than the modern Gray Wolf, that were fearsome predators. Dire wolves in modern-day Utah, creating cattle mutilations, is another fascinating piece of the puzzle. Animals are full of surprises! Just another of the myriad, mind-mangling mysteries of Skinwalker Ranch! A place like no other!

Dire Wolf—Image provided by Shane



REFERENCES

1. Skinwalker — Wikipedia
2. Skinwalker Ranch — Wikipedia
3. Hunt for the Skinwalker Science Confronts the Unexplained at a Remote Ranch in Utah` by C. Kelleher and G. Knapp: p. 15
4. Ibid p. 69
5. Beehive State Monsters: Cryptids and Legends of Utah. David Weatherly. p. 320
6. Ibid p. 157
7. Ibid p. 31
8. Encyclopaedia.com

The Ukrainian deadly scorpion

Ulrich Magin

The article in “Flying Snake” 28 on “mystery Giant Spiders of the World” reminded me of the very strange case of the poisonous animal of Ukraine, as reported in the German press in the mid 19th century.

It was an “unknown animal,” which was preserved in a town on the Dnieper, and the first report was published in 1851, although the text was reprinted in various media within the next decade. At that time, the press referred to Russia, but today the city of Kremenchuk is in the middle of Ukraine.

The eyewitness report first printed in the “Breslauer Zeitung” (the newspaper of modern Wrocław, now in Poland, but at that time in Germany), but I couldn’t find this article. One of the first reprints was in the “Gummersbacher Kreisblatt”, on Wednesday, December 31, 1851.

An unknown animal.

From the Breslauer Zeitung.

A Russian said: I was born in Kremenchuk, a small town on the Dnieper, which, among other things, also houses a small natural history museum, that is, some wolves of rare size, of course stuffed ones, an elk, some mammoth bones, native birds, a few sables and some ore specimens. Behind the half-faded panes of a closet, you can admire a scorpion-like animal of unusual size in a glass vessel, soaked in spirits, and its rear part tapers like a spike. On the glass you can read the inscription: an unknown animal! In response to my curious question as to how this animal got here, the guide told us the following: Long, long ago, on the old knight’s seat, which sits on the hill on the Dnieper and is now falling into disrepair without an owner, lived a nobleman who was as amiable as he was hospitable. The spacious rooms of his manor castle were not sufficient to accommodate those who were attracted by the owner’s reputation for good nature. Then it happened that one day, after a night of raves, one of the guests was missing from breakfast. Since this happened quite often, in order not to disturb the supposed late riser, the party went out hunting without him. But when the missing person did not appear at the lunch table, the merry companions, with tankards in their hands, marched to his chamber door to wake up the latecomer, who usually was quite merry, with a cheerful toast. But

all the knocking, all the noise was in vain, the door remained locked, and when they opened it, the guest, who had been so cheerful yesterday, was lying dead in bed. The pale face, distorted by terrible agony, showed that death, although unexpected, had not come to him without pain. As was understandable, this sad event disturbed the pleasure of those invited, and after paying their last respects to the man who had suddenly passed away, they separated before the actual end of the celebration. Months had passed, and once again guests from far and wide had arrived at the hospitable castle, whose owner decided to celebrate the marriage of his eldest daughter to a neighbouring landowner in the most splendid way. The room in which the young guest had met an unhappy end a long time ago had not been inhabited again since that day. Now that every corner of the spacious house had to be used, it was given to a young officer. Just imagine the foreboding shock of the landlord when he didn't show up at breakfast the next morning and the horrible event repeated itself in every detail, just as it had happened before. However, the most careful search of the room, from which even the wallpaper was torn, produced no more results than the most careful examination of the unfortunate man's corpse. Not the slightest trace suggested any act of violence. The door, the only entrance into the chamber, was found locked and bolted from the inside and the windows were provided with strong iron bars. As much as reason resisted this interpretation, one had to assume that both candidates for death had been struck overnight. The fateful room stood uninhabited again for a full year. The unfortunate event had almost, if not forgotten, slipped from memory when the only son of the master of the house returned home from [St] Petersburg, where he had enjoyed a brilliant upbringing in the imperial court, to greet his family, whom he had not seen since his childhood. Nothing could compare with the joy of his father, who could not get enough of the stately, well-educated youth, in whose entire being every knightly virtue was clearly expressed. Among the hundreds of topics of talk that were exchanged in the course of the day, one was the mysterious incident with the associated sudden deaths, which

made a huge impression on the young Wasily. He himself searched the room most carefully, but his search had no more success than all previous investigations. When the family members had separated late in the evening after a cheerful meal and the old gentleman was already in a sweet slumber, Wasily went into the ominous room instead of the chambers prepared for him. The steward, as the only person in the know, was required to maintain the strictest silence; a bed was prepared on the large armchair for Ivan, the young master's tried and faithful servant, while Wasily, still dressed, threw himself onto the bed. In front of it lay two live pistols on a small table. A bloodcurdling scream woke the residents of the house around midnight. The steward rushed into the fatal chamber and found the faithful Ivan, frozen in terror, on his master's bed. His master was writhing in death throes. The light, burnt far down, uncertainly illuminated the horrible scene. During this time the unfortunate father and the other relatives of the dying man rushed to see him in front of their eyes. He died with his hands pressed convulsively on his head. From the servant's statements it emerged that both of them, after having fought off sleep for as long as possible, had finally given themselves up to a quiet, restless slumber when suddenly the terrible scream woke Ivan and he found his dear master already senseless in the final struggle. When the doctor who had been summoned had examined the corpse and had finally managed to loosen the hands that were cramped as if they were screws on the head, they discovered under them, half crushed, the unknown animal that had drilled its stinger into the seams of the braincase and the had killed the young man just as quickly as his two predecessors.

This report, as I said, was popular with newspapers. I have found several copies of it, from the "Cochemer Anzeiger" (Saturday, November 29th, 1851), to the "Bergisches Volksblatt" (Tuesday, February 10th, 1852), and the last print I found was in the "Rheinisches Volksblatt" from Wednesday, June 10, 1863 (based on a reprint in the "Deutsche Magazin" by Roderberg).

Now – what was it? I first thought of the alien in Ridley Scott's film, but the eyewitness would have been way ahead of his time. An out-of-place Scorpion? The animal was said to have been large, but no measurements are given. Then, well-known French folklorist Michel Meurger came up with one aspect of the case I was completely unaware of. That is that the press report had inspired an early German

horror fiction by Ludwig Bechstein, who had also collected and written fairy stories. (All that now follows is entirely based on Meurger's research)

Bechstein published, in his collection "Hexengeschichten" (1854) a shorty story titled "Furia Infernalis". In this tale, a witch, the Tartar Mataphka, summons an extraordinary being at a magical ceremony in the forest to avenge her son. It is the "Furia Infernalis" [infernal beast]. This small monster will destroy her opponent's male progeny with its deadly sting. Bechstein omits the setting described in the *Breslauer Zeitung*, namely the "disastrous room" in the "hospitable castle" where the guests die. But he keeps the last episode, in which the dangerous crushed animal is discovered in the victim's clenched fist. Bechstein's fairy tale ends as follows: But in the natural history museum in Kremenchuk they still show the unknown, undescribed, indeterminate animal in spirit, but do not dare to call it by its true name" (Ludwig Bechstein: *Hexengeschichten*, Hanau, Müller und Kiepenheuer, 1987, p. 210).

Bechstein even made an effort to classify the strange creature. As Meurger writes, "He sees it as a mixture of a spider, a scorpion and a horse shoe crab (Bechstein, op. cit., p. 210). To describe this colourful creature, the author deliberately chose a creature that was considered unlikely in 1854 – namely, the flying worm or the 'Hell Fury'." His inspiration seem to also have been a German folklore collection, "Deutsche Märchen und Sagen", by the folklorist Johann Wilhelm Wolf (Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1845, p. 497, no. 369: "The Evil Spiders") Wolf heard this legend orally in Belgium. The folklorist describes what can also be found in the "Breslauer Zeitung": the "chamber" in an "inn", now located in Ghent, in which the guests find death. A "bold guy" places a "straw doll" on the bed and waits in hiding. Around midnight he sees "two fist-sized spiders" crawling out of their hiding place to sting the doll. Then the guard crushes them. Now, in 1845 – the same year that Wolf's collection appeared – Collin de Plancy published a new edition of his famous "Dictionnaire Infernal" (Infernal Dictionary). And in his definition "spider" we read a variant of the story. Here Marshal Moritz of Saxony (Maurice de Saxe) (1696–1750) settles down with his servant in an inn room where previous guests were found dead. The servant saves his master's life when he discovers that "a hideous spider [...] sucked his left

breast.”

In a fiction from late 1918, Amédée Gros relocates the Spider’s inn to Avignon. The novelist claims that the mishap occurred in 1691. His story also uses the motif of the doll as bait: here it is a “doll” for painters.

Says Meurger: “In summary, the following can be said: Wolf and Collins de Plancy books appear in 1845. In both cases you can read a story that to this day does not seem to have any literary model. I would title it ‘The Spider’s Inn’. Wolf explains that he heard them himself. So it’s a legend from Ghent. Six years later, another anecdote was published in the *Breslauer Zeitung*. This Silesian document claims to be an ‘eyewitness account,’ but it takes up the framework of the folklore motif of ‘The Spider’s Inn,’ replacing the spider with an ‘unknown animal.’ Consequently, we could be dealing with a ‘newspaper legend,’ a new version of the ‘The Spider’s Inn’ type of story.

Why did the author move the imaginary misadventure to Ukraine? And why to Kremenchuk? Perhaps more detailed research into this location could reveal more information.”

Close Encounters of the Fortean Kind

Paul Screeton

Where it all Started: Redmire

When Richard invited me to contribute an article, all I knew was that this magazine seemed to feature cryptozoological-type subjects. A couple of sample issues confirmed this. So, matching personal experience with the target market, I made a short list of Fortean encounters with fauna and flora anomalies I have encountered.

I begin with some childhood experiences at Redmire, in Yorkshire's Wensleydale, which I wrote up for my magazine *The Ley Hunter*. (1) Centrepiece of these reminiscences was a close encounter with a large, golden, disc-shaped aerial object – my first UFO, so to speak. Classic daylight disc of its time. An omen of awareness.

But this was also the time of unbridled earth energy speculation hot on the heels of more mundane straight trackways plotting and anything went. It was the mid-Fifties and my holidaymaking parents were told by the cottage owners that a gypsy, who had called to sell pegs, had also pointed out that there was a clump of four-leaf shamrock by their wall. Upon hearing this – I would be aged under 11 – I went to inspect and found four-leaf examples. I don't know about any luck, but the traveller had warned that telling outsiders of the special growth's whereabouts would negate any latent good fortune.

According to my article, I revisited the spot in 1969 to find only nettles. But maybe some local wisewoman or wiseman existed in the village, for in 1970 I found the verge tidied and four, five and one six-leaf stem plant mutation on the spot. Naturally, my inquiry speculated that 'perhaps leys increased fertility, perhaps certain currents cause mutations'. Ah! Those lazy, hazy woolly-minded days

of innocent ley hunting before the scolding, sarcastic ‘jealous professors’ (2) and earth mysteries’ internal schisms.

But there was another Fortean oddity I actually neglected to mention, maybe through fear of ridicule and long before I realised the breadth and depth of natural history oddities. What resembled for all the world a sea anemone with tentacles retracted was attached to the side of the storm drain almost opposite the clover patch. It was a single beadlet specimen and I wondered then – as now – if there could be a freshwater equivalent?

Borders Big Cat

If there was an I-Spy book on Forteana, UFOs and ABCs would score top marks.

Stamped indelibly on my consciousness is what I witnessed on a foggy, inhospitable day in 1983: May 8, to be precise, during early afternoon. I was front seat passenger with auditor John Watson driving. We were travelling from Rosden standing stone in Northumberland near Wooler when what is now colloquially described as a black panther crossed the road dodging traffic 100 yards or so ahead of us, travelling from right to left, and disappeared into the undergrowth at the side of the road. There was fencing with openings and it would have been easy for a physical cat of size to vanish into the vegetation, but I only seemed to see it on the road. It appeared around the height of an adult Doberman pinscher, lengthier, lower slung and muscular, moving with a powerful, quick feline gait. Afterwards, John felt it move slower and was even greyish. Why I blurted out after the sighting, “Was that a deer?” is a mystery also, as it is no way such an animal. neither braked

Despite the high strangeness, John never stopped nor even braked. I had a loaded camera in my pocket and it never crossed my mind to attempt to take a photograph. In fact, our whole lack of real co-ordination and inability to have a common perception of the event is

odd. John later told me that he could not but wonder why he did not stop. It was all as embarrassing to him as me, John having been a Northern UFO Investigation Network officer. Long forgotten today, but May 1983 was the height of the Devon operation to find a marauding big cat. Also, three days before 8 May a large felid had been seen at Wendover, Bucks. As for Northumberland, a paragraph recorded that armed police and farmers in Bettyhill, North Sunderland, were hunting for a sheep killer believed to be a puma. No other details, but we were 20 miles away.

So what did we see? It is, perhaps, not widely recognised that the black panther (*panthera pardus*) is nothing but a melanistic leopard. Melanism is found frequently in some species of wild cats, where individuals have almost uniformly dark fur with barely distinguishable rosette-like markings.. Hence the so-call black panther.

As for any significance of where the beast appeared, it seemed an entrance to a park or stately home, i.e. liminal. I calculated that it occurred at Ordnance Survey location NU 084204 below Harehope Hill. I speculated at the time that ley hunters might find special significance. (3) (4)

Daimonic Reality

The most common and striking animal forms to materialise spontaneously and transiently are ‘big hairy monsters’ (yeti, sasquatch and in the UK, woodwose), lake monsters and black dogs – more recently morphing into black panthers.

A concept named Daimonic Reality by its discoverer constitutes a large chunk of the bedrock of my belief system, explaining in one coherent philosophy a large swathe of what we call Forteana, named after Charles Fort, an American seer who chastised lazy scientists who readily swept damned data that challenged their cherished beliefs under the metaphorical carpet. Forteans such as myself are not phased that leopard excrement is photographed, collected and catalogued, occasionally people are scratched and sheep killed, but there are never cat corpses or even clear photographs. Same with ‘Nessie’ and

BHMs. We have Patrick Harpur to thank for his classically-based solid theory of the Nineties deriving from daemons of antiquity; not to mention his sister Merrily, to whom I bequeathed my ABC files when she was writing her essential book on anomalous big cats. (5)
(6)

Crow, master of mimicry

A brief encounter has to be a railway-themed tale. The setting is the seaside railway halt at Seaton Carew, on the Durham Coast Line, from which I commute to my pop-up office at table 15, The Ward Jackson, Hartlepool. My general routine includes providing fatballs and leaving scrumpled slices of bread and leftovers for the wildlife in the woodland between the northbound platform and Seaton Walkway, utilising the former trackbed of a rail link between two steelworks plants.

At the time, around six or seven years ago, my chief benefactors were carrion crows, collared doves, blackbirds, magpies and blue and long-tailed tits.

One aged crow with bedraggled wings met me most mornings and I as I tossed pieces of bread and other titbits, I would keep repeating “Good morning” with varying inflections. He (perhaps female, but I treated my new friend as male) began to perch closer each day, was attentive and would choose the largest morsel to carry off and eat in privacy.

One morning he was absent as I scattered the woodland fayre. Then I heard “Good morning”. I spun around, expecting to see a fellow Friends of Seaton Station member whose pitch and timbre sounded exactly the same as what appeared to have issued from the crow. But it had been my pupil on a branch behind me, head cocked cheekily to one side and with a glint in his eye and a look as if to say, “That fooled you, didn’t it!”

Corvids such as my brief beneficiary are well known for their complex vocalisations and ability to mimic human voices and other sounds, and have the capacity to appreciate the confusion they create.



Animal behaviourists have long been documenting examples of crows' sharp minds, while folklorists have been cataloguing a vibrant body of anecdote and apocrypha surrounding these talented impressionists.

Oddly, that was the crow's last appearance.

However, since then I have regarded the carrion crow as my unexpected totem animal. The Tower of London has its Ravenmaster. As chairman of Friends of Seaton Station, maybe Northern Trains will provide a uniform and appoint me honorary Crowmaster of their station?

Rocky 'Raccoonalike'

Lingering a little longer at Seaton Carew's resort halt, may I point out that mustelids are present and the infant weasels can be playfully entertaining and not shy. Stoats seem to be outnumbered, but one summer morning I got within inches of an adult finding progress difficult. It kept falling off concrete edging to a grassy patch, but very prominent was the fact it had been unable to shed most of its winter ermine coat.

At the time Ralph Whitelock, who had written more than 100 books on countryside affairs, subscribed to my magazine *The Ley Hunter*, so I ventured whether he could offer any explanation for this pelt peculiarity. The clue was in the animal's unsteadiness, he pointed out. Its mobility awkwardness suggesting an injury and such could be capable of stopping it transforming from ermine to natural appearance. A wild talent interrupted.

Albino frog: enough to make your blood run cold

The Screeton family once acquired an albino rabbit with true pink eyes. He eventually spent cold winters cosily in the living-room and was no more trouble than your average house cat. Except on one occasion he grew bored with the TV programme we were watching and I realised he had nibbled through my trousers where he was sitting viewing. Earlier, one winter his garage hutch companion, a black guinea pig named Squeaker expired and I buried him in a tin in the

garden. Afterwards, there was several inches of snow, obscuring any evidence of where the cavy lay entombed. I decided to let Albi out for some exercise. He immediately went to the exact spot where his former chum lay, raised himself on his haunches and used his front paws as if wiping tears away. I found this very moving.

Our garden was also visited two or three years running by an albino frog. No, it was not white. It had no colouration whatsoever. Its body was transparent. The veins visible and the heart pumping for all to see. No need for dissection! What a mutation. Of course, it is doubtless coincidence that Hartlepool nuclear power station looms only two miles away.

Carlisle crystal portal to faeryland

As we fortune tellers say, “Weird shit happens’. Border city Carlisle has its Cursing Stone, Citadel station is a marshalling yard for Scots drunks and on the zebra crossing outside eight years ago, I was badly injured by a trainee doctor motorist (I had just lost the sight in one eye through sudden glaucoma, and my leg injury could be classed as ‘hobbling’ in faerylore).

But I am here recalling an encounter with an elemental, a denizen of the Secret Commonwealth. It was published in my seminal earth mysteries study Quicksilver Heritage, published exactly 50 years ago. (7) The road into Carlisle from the massive railway marshalling yard at Kingmoor is narrow, and while walking down it towards the overgrown tump by the former house which housed railwaymen lodging overnight, I was forced to step on to the verge as a car approached. Continuing walking through the grass that sunny afternoon around 1972 I stepped on to a stone. I halted, looked down, and it glistened. It was clearly quartz: it had been fashioned into a convex shape and was deeply embedded. I touched it for about half a minute then began to move away.

But I saw something move a yard or so ahead of me. Whatever it was jumped like a frog and was frog shaped, but two to three feet high. It was brown but its form was hazy, difficult to describe but the effect was not dissimilar to a television screen when the lines go crazy. I had the impression that what I had seen was an elemental and that I perceived it at the edge of my consciousness.

Upon reading a natural history guide to denizens of elfland by Geoffrey Hodson, I recognised it to have been an earth gnome, a lankly being, sometimes solitary and disproportionate to human senses. Hodson regarded them as relics of Lemurian days and possibly representations of such times. In England they are usually black, or as I saw, peaty brown, but he, unlike me, found their atmosphere decidedly unpleasant.

I never expected to see an elemental, though I was perfectly willing to believe in their existence.

Two aspects of my experience are worthy of consideration, that is if my testimony is to be believed and that I did not have an hallucination. One is the fact that the experience took place on a ley; the second is the possibility that the quartz itself was instrumental somehow in bringing about the sighting, i.e. raising my consciousness while I touched it.

Yes, all very woolly thinking and of its half-century ago age!

References:

- (1) Screeton, Paul. Redmire, The Ley Hunter, No. 13, 1970.
- (2) Coined by Jane Gaskell, *The Shiny Narrow Grin*.
- (3) Screeton, Paul. Wild in the Country (Northumberland Deliverance), Northern Earth Mysteries, No. 24, 1983.
- (4) Screeton, Paul. A Personal Black Panther Sighting in Northumberland, 1983, The Shaman, No. 10, 1985.
- (5) Harpur, Merrily. Mystery Big Cats, Heart of Albion Press.

- (6) Harpur, Patrick. *Daimonic Reality: Understanding Otherworld Encounters* (Viking, 1994)
- (7) Screeton, Paul, *Quicksilver Heritage: The Mystic Leys – Their Legacy of Ancient Wisdom*, Thorsons Publishers, 1974; Abacus edition, 1977.

Mystery cats of East Cheshire

Richard Muirhead

The area immediately surrounding Macclesfield, a town with a population of 57,539 according to the 2021 census, in the plain beneath the hills of the Peak District, is a somewhat overlooked hot-spot for ABCs, ie Alien Big Cats. About twenty-five years ago a (then) co-worker at the Oxfam shop in Macclesfield saw a grey-ish lynx-like cat in upper Hurdsfield, a suburb of Macclesfield in an area of open countryside. A taxi driver I was talking to about ten years ago saw a large black cat bound across the road whilst he was driving his taxi in the Macclesfield suburb of Tytherington. A large lynx-like cat was once seen in the Weston district of Macclesfield if my memory serves me correctly, this would be at least ten years ago; it was reported in the Macclesfield Express. It may have been a large domestic feral cat. Between 1990 and 1993 “D” and a RSPCA inspector “L.H.” saw a large black cat in Adlington near Macclesfield. Apparently, according to my source, the incident was hushed up by the police, presumably to avoid panic. Police marksmen were involved and a sheep’s spine was found in a tree. In the last approximately thirty-five years mystery large cats have also been seen in Disley and Lyme Park, an estate in Cheshire. According to my correspondent “S.S.”, she saw a serval cat (the Beast of Bollington) in the village of Bollington near Macclesfield on Good Friday 2020, ie April 10th. This was on Sugar Lane, Bollington. The eyewitness (S.S.) at first thought it was a thin fox, but as you can see from the photo on the front cover of this issue of Flying Snake it looks far from being fox-like, indeed it is confusing as to exactly what it *does* show. It looks a bit like a composite animal but I am not accusing S.S. of fakery. Its tail was described as being “shaped like a cheetah’s”. S.S reacted with fear when she saw the mystery cat or serval, which makes me think she saw something genuinely mysterious rather than a large domestic moggy. It needs to be noted that it was S.S.’s suggestion backed up by myself that it was a

-serval but on the On The Track You Tube episode number 279.1 in April 2024 entirely devoted to the mystery cats of East Cheshire, particularly this “Beast of Bollington”, it was the opinion of Dr Karl Shuker that this beast was a hoax made up of a composite image, with the stripes of a hyena and the opinion of Richard Freeman that the cat could be a second or third generation hybrid between a serval and a domestic moggy, creating a savannah cat. Freeman pointed out that such hybrids threw up some intriguing markings such as in the case of the Beast of Bollington. Jon Downes on the same OTT episode mentioned that the cat appeared to have a collar on. Jon had no idea what the cat was. Ve Macrinnon pointed out that the photo was too blurry to make a definitive identification.



Wikipedia: Full
body portrait of a 4-
month old
F1 Savannah cat.
By Jason Douglas

This is the full account S.S. sent me regarding her sighting of the mystery cat in Bollington: “ It was Good Friday 2020. I was on Sugar lane just up from the Vale pub. As I crested the hill I saw a sheep emerge from the farm track in my left. Came across in front of me diagonally and at first I thought it was a thin fox until I saw its tail which was shaped like a cheetahs. I stopped. It stopped and we eyeballed each other. Tbh I feared it would run at me and my dog. Took me a moment to realise it was a feral cat. It was thin. Long whiskers. Grey stripes like a cat and a long thin tail that curled up at the end. It walked up to the canal bridge then sat looking at me then made off down a track towards Clarence mill. Feel free to use the pictures. Think it was 16 April. Definitely Good Friday 2020.” As I have said earlier it was actually April 10th. This is the account D.N. sent me about the mystery cat in Adlington: “Hi Richard It is a while ago now but around 90-93 can’t remember the exact timeframe I was on placement with the RSPCA Inspector at the time Len Howard and there were reports of a large black cat (panther) in the fields of Adlington. We met with the police from Poynton and at the time it was very much hushed up as they didn’t want people finding out and then spectators coming to try and find it. The farmer had found sheep spine in a tree and the cattle were refusing to go near the woods. It was taken very seriously and police marksmen were involved. I remember the officer giving Len a telling off for bringing me to the farm as it was hushed but I did a lot of research (before the days of google!) and Len presented the info to the police. At the time BBC wildlife Magazine had done an article on big cats in Britain and a map of sightings (not sure timeframe of the magazine as I was a regular subscriber) and from memory there were sightings in Glosop and Lyme Park and possibly Disley. It’s thought it may have come down with the deer. After a couple of weeks it disappeared and the cows returned to the fields and everything back to normal. This cat will be long dead now. But also if it’s one of the cats from when the Dangerous Wild Animals Act of 76 was introduced then it must have been nearing the end although I suppose it didn’t have a predator

The Gruesome Gbahali—Lurking in Liberia? Part One

Dr Karl Shuker

Shuker Nature March 2nd 2024



**Representation of the gbahali based upon eyewitness descriptions
(© Tim Morris)**

Since 1900, the West African country of Liberia, still plentifully supplied with coastal mangrove swamps and interior rainforests, and long deemed a biodiversity hotspot by zoologists, has been the scene of at least four major zoological discoveries of species new to science or rediscoveries of species believed extinct. Namely, the giant forest hog *Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*, the pygmy hippopotamus *Choeropsis liberiensis*, Jentink's duiker *Cephalophus jentinki*, and the Liberian mongoose *Liberiictis kuhni*.

All of these are mammals, of course, but there is also some thought-provoking evidence to suggest that a fifth major zoological find is still waiting to be made here – and this time of the reptilian variety.



West Africa's dwarf crocodile, note its short snout (public domain)

Four species of crocodilian are known to exist in Liberia. These are the Nile crocodile *Crocodylus niloticus*, the West African dwarf crocodile *Osteolaemus tetraspis*, the West African slender-snouted crocodile *Mecistops cataphractus*, and the West African or sacred crocodile *C. suchus* (only quite recently delineated from the Nile crocodile as a valid distinct species in its own right). The first two are restricted to this country's coastal swamps, and are considered rare, as is the third (a little-studied, human-avoiding species), whereas the fourth one, which occurs further inland, is quite common.



**West African slender-snouted crocodile (© Thesupermat/
Wikipedia – CC BY-SA 3.0 licence)**

However, native Liberians also speak of a fifth crocodile-like creature, currently unknown to science, which they refer to as the gbahali (pronounced 'bar-hye'), and consider to be larger and more dangerous than even the Nile crocodile – itself a highly aggressive, notorious man-eater that can grow up to 21 ft long.

The gbahali first attracted widespread Western attention on 20 December 2007, when veteran American cryptozoologist Loren Coleman published on the mystery beast website *Cryptomundo* a communication that he had received the previous day. It was from a correspondent named John-Mark Sheppard (some accounts spell his surname as Shephard) – an American missionary working at that time

with an international relief and development organisation in northernmost Liberia's Lofa County, near this country's border with Guinea.

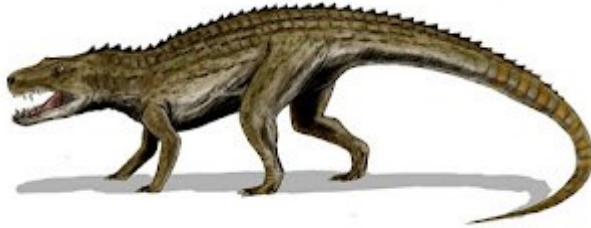
In his communication, Sheppard revealed that he had learnt from the indigenous people there about several strange, unidentified creatures that may be of potential cryptozoological interest, including the gbahali. He had spoken to a number of alleged eyewitnesses who claimed to have seen the latter mystery beast in recent years, and according to their testimony, as documented by Sheppard:

It is described as being like a crocodile or monitor lizard, but much larger (up to 25 or 30 ft long). It has an armored back with three rows of serrations running down it, a powerful tail, and a short snout with many large teeth. It is known to be an ambush predator, carrying its prey underwater to drown before coming on shore to eat it.

Sheppard even travelled to a village deep in the Liberian rainforest where the fishermen claimed to have actually caught gbahali specimens, using nets to capture them and shotguns to kill them, before butchering their carcasses for meat, which they then sold at local markets. They had even preserved the skull of one such specimen, which had been retained in the village until rebels invaded it during this country's civil war (which ended in 2003) and set it ablaze, destroying everything there, including that scientifically-precious gbahali skull.

When interviewing the villagers, Sheppard showed them various illustrations of modern-day and prehistoric crocodilians and crocodilian-like animals that he had downloaded from the internet. Of these, the creature that they considered most similar in appearance to the gbahali was an artistic reconstruction of the likely appearance in life of a prehistoric reptile from North America's Late Triassic Period, known as *Postosuchus*. This very sizeable beast, up to 6 m long, belonged to

a long-extinct taxonomic family whose members, known as rauisuchians, were related to crocodilians.



**Representation of the possible appearance in life
of *Postosuchus* in quadrupedal mode (© Nobu Tamura/
Wikipedia – CC BY-SA 3.0 licence)**

The locals stated that the head and body of *Postosuchus* as depicted in the artistic reconstruction resembled that of the gbahali, but that its legs were more erect (i.e. supporting its body from below) than the gbahali's, which are allegedly semi-erect in stance (i.e. more sprawling), like those of crocodilians.

Continuing his narrative, Sheppard stated:

The river in which these creatures are said to live is very remote, passing through large areas of uninhabited forest. They are said to mainly be seen during the rainy season, when they travel upstream to look for food. They are greatly feared by the local population, because they have been known to kill people. Indeed, according to Sheppard one such incident may have occurred as recently as November 2007, just a month before he had sent his communication to Coleman. A man had been attacked and killed by a possible gbahali near a village named Gelema, on that selfsame river. When the United Nations police were sent there to investigate this incident, all that they could find was the victim's head and a few body parts that the creature had left behind on the river bank. This ties in with local claims mentioned above by Sheppard whereby the gbahali drowns its victim, then comes ashore with their dead body to consume it there.

Worthy of note, incidentally, is that back when Gelema's official

town meeting house was built, its length was deliberately constructed so as to correspond with that of a gbahali that had been killed there some years previously. Consequently, this grim mystery beast would indeed appear to be native to the area encompassing Gelema.

Also of interest, as specifically pointed out by Sheppard when concluding his account of the gbahali, the local people do not consider this beast to be in any way magical or supernatural. Instead, they simply look upon it as just another normal, ordinary animal native to their locality (albeit a very large, dangerous one), nothing more – which in turn tends to lend plausibility to their testimony concerning it

Sheppard ended with a tantalizingly brief mention of a photograph that had supposedly been taken of a gbahali sometime in the previous 10 years during an attempt to capture this creature, but he made no mention of what had happened to it, always assuming of course that such a picture had indeed been obtained.

After spending many years behind the camera as a first-rate, highly-acclaimed film/TV cameraman and cinematographer, in 2017 Paul 'Mungo' Mungeam stepped in front of it to present a new cryptozoology-themed TV documentary show entitled *Expedition Mungo*. Each of its episodes (filmed in 2016 and early 2017) saw him and his own film crew visit a different location around the world allegedly inhabited by a mysterious creature seemingly unknown to science. One of these episodes saw them in Liberia's Lofa County, seeking the gbahali, and where they actually interviewed Sheppard on screen

.Mungo's gbahali expedition focused its attention upon the Kahai River and its tributaries, where this greatly-feared creature is known by the locals to exist and where, therefore, they avoid as much as possible unless it is absolutely essential to cross from one riverbank to another or to hunt for food there. One villager named Momo informed Mungo that he and his brother had encountered a gbahali on land once while they were hunting on the Kahai River, but once seen it disappeared into the water.



**Rainforest in Liberia's Lofa County (©) M Rödel *et al.*/Wikipedia
– CC BY 4.0 licence**

Discounting the possibility that it was merely a crocodile, Momo stated that its head was lizard-like but with its eyes placed far back on it, a trait often exhibited by aquatic animals, and its teeth were interlocking. Moreover, although it walked on all fours like a crocodile, its body was raised up, held off the ground to a greater degree than a crocodile's is. He also mentioned to Mungo that one such creature had killed and devoured three men who had been attempting to cross the Kahai on a raft at dusk. Similarly, another alleged gbahali eyewitness interviewed by Mungo, a man named Isaac from Monena, a remote Liberian frontier village, recalled an oft-told claimed killing of a man in a shallow river by a gbahali. The man had been attempting to cross the river on foot to reach a party of fisherman friends on the far bank. His friends told him not to cross, because a gbahali had been seen there earlier that same day, but he ignored their advice and proceeded to wade across. Before he could reach the other side, however, a gbahali surfaced, seized the man, and dragged him beneath the water, never to be seen again.

As for Isaac's own sighting, which had occurred not long before Mungo had arrived at Monena in early 2017: just like Momo, Isaac had been fishing with his own brother on the river nearby when he saw something swimming towards his brother:

He turned around and said: "It looks like a crocodile". I said: "Hey, that is not a crocodile, that is an animal bigger than a crocodile". We're talking about the Gbahali...The mouth was in the form of a lizard.

Isaac estimated the gbahali to have measured around 20 ft long, and insisted that it was very different in appearance from a crocodile.

Also interviewed by Mungo at Monena was fisherman Seiku, who divides his time between this village and a camp on an even more remote stretch of the Kahai. Seiku claimed to have seen a gbahali twice during his travails along this route in September 2016, again not long before Mungo's arrival here.

Several other villagers interviewed by Mungo at Monena also claimed to have seen a gbahali, but as Sheppard had discovered earlier during his own investigations, they did not consider it to be in any way magical or paranormal, just a normal, ordinary creature like all of the other animal species inhabiting this locality.

Sadly, Mungo and his team did not have any sightings of their own, but if, as fervently averred by Liberia's Lofa County hunters and fishermen, the gbahali is indeed a real, flesh-and-blood beast, what might it be?



Nile crocodile (© Timothy A Gonsalves/Wikipedia – CC BY-SA 4.0 licence)

The most conservative identity is the Nile crocodile (Liberia's other three crocodile species are much too small and/or wary of human proximity). Although officially confined to this country's coastal swamps, perhaps some stragglers have penetrated further inland, reaching rivers, tributaries, and surrounding terrain containing plenty of suitable prey, enabling them to thrive and establish viable populations there, and possibly eventually attaining greater sizes than their coastal ancestors, their increased weight readily buoyed by their watery habitat.

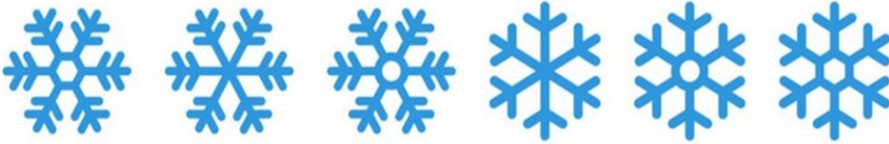
Yet the locals are adamant that the gbahali is no ordinary crocodile, or even a crocodile at all, emphasizing its short-snouted, lizard-like head and its more erect limbs as notable differentiating features. Also, its claimed behaviour of killing its prey in the water by drowning it but then bringing it onto land to consume it differs from typical crocodile feeding behaviour, in which the prey is normally eaten in the water, the latter being utilized as a means of softening the prey's carcass for easier consumption.

An alternative crocodilian option to consider is an unknown giant-sized species or morphological variety of West Africa's *Osteolaemus* dwarf crocodile. This is certainly appealing, inasmuch as it would combine the latter's shorter muzzle and more terrestrial lifestyle as reported also for the gbahali with the gbahali's extra-large size.

Looking beyond crocodiles, Liberia is home to some sizeable monitor lizards (varanids), including the West African Nile monitor *Varanus stellatus*, up to 7.2 ft long, whose heads, more erect stance than crocodiles, and terrestrial consumption of prey recall the gbahali. However, the latter's great size (even allowing for exaggeration upon the part of its frightened eyewitnesses) and its very distinctive armoured, tri-serrated dorsal surface do not. exaggeration upon the part of its frightened eyewitnesses) and its very distinctive armoured, tri-serrated dorsal surface do not.

Visitors from the Ice Age World

Greg Brick, PhD



The fish lye closely in their watry bed / And find an icy ceiling o’re their head.”—*A Winter Wonder* (1684)

The earliest published account of a cave in the state of Minnesota, USA, was by British colonial explorer Jonathan Carver (1710-1780). Carver’s Cave still exists in a city park in St. Paul, the capital of Minnesota.

Carver visited what he called the “Great Cave” in 1766 and again in 1767. It achieved fame after his best-selling *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America* appeared in 1778. Others, a generation later, renamed it Carver’s Cave. Native Americans have always referred to it as *Wakan Tipi*, the Dwelling of the Great Spirit.



On November 14, 1766, Carver reported his initial exploration of the cave:

About thirty miles below the Falls of St. Anthony, at which I arrived the tenth day after I left Lake Pepin, is a remarkable cave of an amazing depth. The Indians term it Wakon-teebe, that is, the Dwelling of the Great Spirit. The entrance into it is about ten feet wide, the height of it five feet. The arch within is near fifteen feet high and about thirty feet broad. The bottom of it consists of fine clear sand. About twenty feet from the entrance begins a lake, the water of which is transparent, and extends to an unsearchable distance; for the darkness of the cave prevents all attempts to acquire a knowledge of it. I threw a small pebble towards the interior parts of it with my utmost strength: I could hear that it fell into the water, and notwithstanding it was of so small a size, it caused an astonishing and horrible noise that reverberated through all those gloomy regions.

Carver engraved the arms of the king of England alongside the Indian petroglyphs in the cave. He spent the winter with the Indians in a bark house. The following spring he returned and on May 1, 1767, while attending a “grand council” at the cave, supposedly received from the Indians a land grant of 10,000 square miles!

By 1913, however, Carver’s Cave had vanished. Local businessmen undertook to relocate and dig it open again for commercial purposes. They soon succeeded. On November 13 of that year, it was reported in the newspaper that blind crayfish had been seen in the subterranean lake that fills the cave. Blind crayfish are well-documented from caves in the southeastern United States, as at Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, south of the glacial border. To find them in a northern state like Minnesota, hundreds of miles from their usual haunts, is unheard of. No further sightings have taken place.

But the story needn't end with a newspaper clipping, as there's a far more intriguing possibility. Suppose the 1913 sighting was valid—what then? It's likely that blind crayfish did live in Minnesota during the last warm interglacial phase, and it's just assumed that they were wiped out by the oncoming glaciers. But other crustaceans have survived in groundwater under the glaciers of Castleguard Mountain in Alberta, Canada, to the present day. Could it be that Minnesota's blind crayfish lived a similar forlorn existence, with a whole watery world to themselves, under the vast continental ice sheet—a crystalline refugium—only just now to peep out at us? Something to ponder!

ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS
NOVEMBER 13, 1913.

BLIND CRAYFISH IN CARVER'S CAVE

Crustacean Slightly Smaller
Than Usual Run Are Found
in Water.

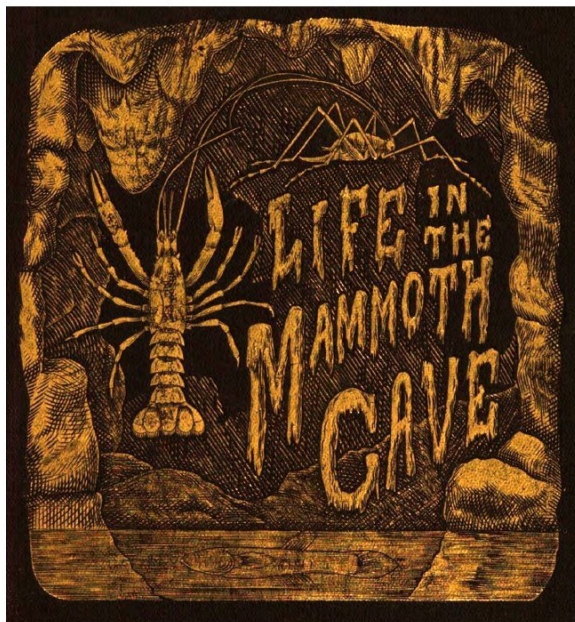
NO INDICATIONS OF EYES

Only Living Thing That Has Come
From Cavern's Dark-
ness.

Blind crayfish have been found in Carver's cave. Several have floated from the subterranean lake or beyond from the unexplored chambers that lie past the narrow opening of the first cavern, in the stream that is draining the water.

They are slightly smaller than ordinary crayfish and move helplessly in the light. There are no indications eyes where eyes should be. These are the only living things that have come from the darkness since it was lifted last week, when men working under John H. Colwell uncovered the mouth. They may have come from the first chamber, or lowering the level of the water may have brought them from some farther cavern.

A similar species of the crab family is found in the Mammoth cave of Kentucky.



Bealings Bells

Loes Modderman

Bells have always fascinated people, in many cultures. Making bigger bells than cow bells has always been a challenge, and legends developed around their casting.

One Japanese legend tells the story of a father who was a master bell maker, but the assignment of making a very big and important bell for the Emperor threatened to surpass his abilities. One after another cast was a failure, and as was 'normal' in those days, his life was on the line.

In the final trial his lovely daughter whom he loved more than anything jumped into the cauldron with boiling bronze to save her father. Being a virgin her innocence made the bell magical. The Emperor was satisfied and the father was spared, but the terrible cost of his dear daughter's sacrifice destroyed him.

Bells were used in the temples and churches of many religions, calling the faithful to God, or helping prayers to ascend to the heavens. In Ireland the tradition developed of the 'Passing bell', to announce the death of someone. In England the tradition of bell ringing by parishioners is still very much alive, and it is an honour to fulfill that task. No wonder that bells, having a voice, were often seen as having personalities as well. In Christianity they were baptised like children, and given a name. An unbaptised bell would attract the devil.

It was a very special event when a new bell was hung in a church tower, and a priest was there to give the bell his blessing

When in WWII bells were claimed by the Nazi's to be remelted into bullets, they were defended with a passion. The desecration of 'the voice of God' was not taken lightly.

That bells are immortal like human beings is a belief that is found in many legends around villages that disappeared in the sea during a flood. Still, on certain days, the bells of the church can be heard ringing, when you listen very closely...

Not only people are attracted to their bronzen voice. Spirits are too. There are plenty of stories in newspapers from the 19th century about bells and clocks that respond to the passing of someone they were connected with. Sensitive things, bells!

The lore of bells is endless and mightily interesting, but Richard asked me to write about one event that has really happened: the ringing of Bealings Bells. Not the impressive bells that are found elsewhere, but small bells, used to ring when someone in the house needed assistance, and a member of the staff had to come running. *Great Bealings House*, situated in the village *Great Bealings*, near Ipswich, Suffolk, was a big and stately home like so many in England still are.



The year was 1834.

There is a lot written about Bealings Bells. My information comes from the *GHOST BOOK* (1955) by Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, collector and researcher of the unusual. In 1834 the house was inhabited by Major Edward Moor, a decent and reliable man who wrote everything that happened down with great precision, worthy of the SPR. Alastair MacGregor was a guest in Bealings House, and investigated the bells himself, but after they stopped doing what made them famous. He trusted Major Moor's reports completely.

In the kitchen of Bealings House nine bells were attached to cords, every one of them connected to different rooms. We know the situation from period movies: someone in a room pulls a cord, and elsewhere a servant is alerted to do some task.

All had been well for years. Till that morning of Sunday of the second February 1834, when something decided on change. When the Major came home, he was informed that the bell of the dining room had rung twice, without a cause. The next day the same bell rung four times, without anyone being in the dining room, and the next day all nine joined in the chorus with a vengeance. The Major heard it when he came home that day. Every 15 minutes five of the bells had rung since three o'clock. Like clockwork. The staff and the Major checked all the rooms several times, checked the cords, checked the bells, but no explanation was found. And since the Major was no fool, he knew exactly how the system was constructed and what could go wrong, if anything. For 28 years the bells had behaved, but now they were out of control and kept jumping and sounding when and how they pleased. It was rather exasperating, and the Major decided to tell the story to the Ipswich Journal, stating that he NO, didn't have a monkey, and NO, not a cat, and NO, not an invasion of rats and mice climbing the cords. This to prevent readers to come up with these 'explanations'.

Everyone interested in paranormal occurrences is familiar with the fact that most people have an opinion, by definition uninformed because they never do any research themselves but still think that the ones who do are brainless nitwits who allow themselves to be fooled. The article in the journal didn't cause armchair 'experts' to shut up. On the contrary: the desperate Major was flooded with advice and "I'm sure that" suggestions, not once but continuous because 'the major wouldn't listen'. Most of the 'experts' turned out to be totally ignorant on the mechanics of bell ringing.

And the bells kept ringing, oblivious to the chaos they caused. Even bells that were detached from their cords turned out to be able to ring, so much that a workman who was busy reattaching a bell almost fell off his ladder when the bell rang enthusiastically in his face. "Satan is in the bells!!!" he screamed. He left in a panic and never returned.

On March 27 of that year the bells stopped ringing.

Like in all poltergeist infestations there is an end to the energy needed. In this case there doesn't seem to have been a human focus, but maybe there was a servant who attracted the manifestations. She is not mentioned, as far as I know. In those days the knowledge about poltergeists was, I think, nonexistent.

In 1841 Major Edward Moor published a book about his bells, based on all his painstaking notes, and later research in abnormal bell-behaviour elsewhere.

The book is very rare and very expensive. Maybe it will be digitalised, one day.

Bealings House has been altered and modernised since the bellringing episode.

It's doubtful if the people of Great Bealings are aware of this remarkable episode in the history of their village.

On the Identity of Large Birds of Prey Reported in New Zealand

Part Two

Lana Thilo

I think there are two suitable candidates that are much more likely, one extinct and one extant.

Eyles's harrier (*Circus teauteensis*) was a close relative of the modern swamp harrier. It was a fast-flapping pursuit predator, specialized in chasing down avian prey. Several sites represent nests, filled with the partial skeletons of medium-sized birds. It is unknown when or why exactly it went extinct, most suspect that it met its end alongside other birds in the 1400's.

While the harrier faced no shortage of food, being a generalist, other forms of human interference are suspected to have led to its demise. Eyles's harrier fossils are relatively rare, but as far as we can tell are restricted to a few forested areas across both North and South Island¹. The Maori cleared most of those forests for agriculture as they settled, and even seem to have hunted the harrier to some degree; bones occasionally appear in middens across New Zealand¹. This bird, like Haast's eagle, nested on the ground – its young would've been potential targets for marauding rodents. If this bird was being hunted and evicted, arguably in a worse position than the eagle, why is it a better candidate?

In summary, it's more likely to have survived. While habitat destruction certainly would've limited the population, there were pockets of suitable habitat up until the late 1800's¹. The bird wasn't a picky eater, and likely would've done well in what little habitat remained, at least for a while, at least until those patches of forest were cleared as well during the early 19th century. That is just speculation, and ultimately, Eyles's harrier would go extinct, maybe alongside the moas and Haast's eagle, or maybe sometime later – until we find more fossils, we can not know for sure.

Another, arguably more likely candidate would be the Wedge-tailed eagle. Wedge-tailed eagles (*Aquila audax*) are the largest birds of prey in Oceania and quite powerful predators; they were persecuted and nearly hunted to extinction for taking livestock during the early 20th century. The main issue with this identity is the fact that Wedge-tails are not native to New Zealand, and have only been confirmed in that area a handful of times¹⁰; the presence of multiple in the region is unprecedented.

When comparing my two proposed identities to the birds reported by Haast and Douglas, there are some aspects that match with one bird but not the other, and some that fit both. The odd combination of features may suggest several different things, and has certainly led to confusion and hastiness in assigning a potential identity to these birds.

Starting with Haast, he used the Swamp harrier (*Circus approximans*) as a point of comparison twice. While this may initially lead to the conclusion that Haast saw a harrier-type bird, the Swamp harrier was simply the only suitable point of reference, as it is the only documented large bird of prey native to the region where Haast had his sightings. The bird is noted to have sharper wings than the Swamp harrier, something true for both the Wedge-tail and Eyles's harrier. Haast saw his birds during both day and night - something more in-line with the Wedge-tail, a cathemeral bird, than the harrier, which was likely diurnal. However, Haast does state that the bird was most likely attracted to the campfire - the harrier, a visual hunter, being attracted by fire, which often provides free meals, certainly makes sense. Haast specifically denotes that he heard the flapping of the wings for some time before seeing the bird; obviously, all birds flap their wings, but Eyles's harrier had to flap in order to keep its great weight in the air, it couldn't soar like its ancestors and relatives (or Haast's eagle and the Wedge-tail). Haast's birds are described as being dark in color, which matches the wedge-tail, is unknown in the harrier, and importantly isn't the case in Haast's eagle (which was likely a reddish color, based on Maori stories¹¹). Haast's companions were completely unfamiliar with the bird, and it was speculated to be an eagle (Wedge-tail?) or hawk, something that obviously wouldn't match with the harrier, unless it was truly quite distinct from its closest relatives (which doesn't entirely seem to be the case based on fossil evidence, but can't be ruled out due to the lack of feathers and soft tissue

specimens). Haast saw his bird pursuing a smaller bird, something in line with both the Wedge-tail and Eyles's harrier. Douglas' report is much briefer. He doesn't mention color, beak shape, or any other defining features outside of size and leg strength. While one can suspect that this was due to the similarity of his birds to the Swamp harrier, a bird that would've been familiar to him, there are holes in this idea and many other equally as likely alternatives. Douglas never visited Australia, where the Wedge-tail is from – he was likely unfamiliar with the eagle, but may have assumed that it was a known and documented species in the region. The fact that he shot and ate the birds however, is reminiscent of the Maori hunting Eyles's harrier. Similarly, his note that the birds didn't have much carrying power is suggestive of the harrier for one major reason – eagles have strong, grasping talons used to carry food (or babies, as Douglas notes in reference to a rumor spread at the time) while harriers do not; harriers pin their prey down under their body weight and often eat it at the spot where it was killed. Douglas' birds had wingspans of 6 feet 9 inches and 8 feet 4 inches respectively, both within the range of the Wedge-tail. The larger wingspan is out of the known range of Eyles's harrier, but there are many potential explanations for this difference - our material of the harrier is fairly scrappy, mostly isolated elements rather than complete skeletons which could mean it grew larger than we know currently, and the bird's potential alpine habitat may suggest a large size ala Bergmann's rule. That is, of course, just speculation and certainly could be nothing more than attempts to justify something that isn't the case.

It is my opinion that Haast and Douglas witnessed, by some absurd coincidence or maybe limited habitation of the area, stray Wedge-tailed eagles, although Eyles's harriers cannot be ruled out. While the unlikelihood of at least two Wedge-tails (potentially more) straying into New Zealand during the late 1800's should be noted, the persistence of the extinct harrier, although certainly plausible, is just as unprecedented. I am, however, confident that Haast's eagle can be completely ruled out, it certainly went extinct long before due these sightings ever took place. My proposed identities are unfortunately just a best guess - what those explorers saw will likely remain a mystery forever, something to be discussed and speculated on for a long time to come.

1 - Worthy, Trevor H., and Richard N. Holdaway. *The Lost World of the Moa: Prehistoric Life of New Zealand*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2002

2 - Naish, D. (n.d.). *Darren Naish: Tetrapod Zoology: The biggest eagle, part I*. <http://darrennaish.blogspot.com/2006/03/biggest-eagle-part-i.html>

3 - van Heteren AH, Wroe S, Tsang LR, Mitchell DR, Ross P, Ledogar JA, Attard MRG, Sustaita D, Clausen P, Scofield RP, Sansalone G. New Zealand's extinct giant raptor (*Hieraaetus moorei*) killed like an eagle, ate like a condor. *Proc Biol Sci*. 2021 Dec 8;288 (1964):20211913. doi: 10.1098/rspb.2021.1913. Epub 2021 Dec 1. PMID: 34847767; PMCID: PMC8634616.

4 - Evans, Kate (November 2018). "Return of the Lost Birds". *New Zealand Geographic* (154): 30. ISSN 0113-9967.

5 - Rodgers, P. (2020, September 18). *Maori legend of man-eating bird is true*. NZ Herald. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/maori-legend-of-man-eating-bird-is-true/QRUOJKCF524QMJKX5P7SMTGO2Y/>

6 - Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. <https://cbop.audubon.org/conservation/human-activity-and-disturbances-near-active-bald-eagle-nests>

7 - Roberts, D., Solow, A. When did the dodo become extinct?. *Nature* **426**, 245 (2003). <https://doi.org/10.1038/426245a>

8 - Brook BW, Sleightholme SR, Campbell CR, Jarić I, Buettel JC. Resolving when (and where) the Thylacine went extinct. *Sci Total Environ*. 2023 Jun 15;877:162878. doi: 10.1016/j.scitotenv.2023.162878. Epub 2023 Mar 18. PMID: 36934937.

9 - Scofield, R. Paul., and Ken. W. S. Ashwell. "Rapid Somatic Expansion Causes the Brain to Lag behind: The Case of the Brain and Behavior of New Zealand's Haast's Eagle (*Harpagornis moorei*)."
Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology, vol. 29, no. 3, 2009, pp. 637–49. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20627079>

10 - Steiner, J. (2020, September 16). *The eagle has landed?* NZ Herald. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/the-eagle-has-landed/R7HQGJTFSDED5HRBXCHHU5543I>

11 - *Haast's eagle* | *New Zealand Birds Online*. (n.d.). <https://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/haasts-eagle>

Did the Japanese release their poisonous snakes into British Hong Kong?

Richard Muirhead

In late April 2024 I came across a fascinating story on the Hong Kong Snakes Facebook group about how during World War 2 the Japanese had introduced their own species of poisonous snakes into Stonecutters Island near Kowloon in order to milk their venom. The following is a partial extract from the conversation from March 2019:

K.D.: Question and discussion for the snake experts and HK historians.

In a discussion the other day, I heard it exclaimed with "great authority" that the occupying WW2 Japanese forces, brought several non-native species of venomous snakes to Hong Kong, as part of their venom-milking activities on Stonecutters Island. I was aware that they had used Stonecutters to develop anti-venom vaccines for their troops operating in SE Asia, but had never heard of non-native species being introduced there.

The result of this was the escape of these non-native species into the wild on the liberation, the suggestion being that many of the venomous species in Hong Kong became native as a result of this.

I discounted the idea as, from the reading I've done over my 40+ years in HK, the fact that all local venomous species are common across all parts of southern China around Hong Kong, and this particular twist on the story at Stonecutters had never surfaced even in 'bar-top' speculation as linked to either escape of non-native species or the cause of many of our species. Plus, most (if not all) HK species are common all over SE Asia, so there was probably no need to introduce other species. But just wondering whether anybody had heard this story, and

whether there might have been any truth in any of it. Were non-native species used, and maybe escaped, at Stonecutters? Whether any of our species are here as a result of human introduction?

N.S.: Always struck me as an urban myth, as was applied to Lamma. Would the Japanese have gone around capturing local snakes. Or are they introducing Japanese snakes? If not, then the snakes were indigenous, no? Or am I missing the point?

B.R.: A bit of anecdotal "evidence" on the subject. Growing up in HK and then having lived in Mei Foo since 1976, which is opposite Stonecutters Island, I remember hearing that there were an abnormal number of venomous snakes on the island because of escapees from the Japanese having kept a lot there for various reasons during WW2. (Besides hearing that they used them for experiments in producing anti-venom, I also heard that they had snake pits where they would put some of their prisoners. During the west Kowloon reclamation, I heard speculation as to whether joining Stonecutters with Kowloon might lead to an increase in venomous snakes in parts of Kowloon. I haven't heard of any general increase since the reclamation was complete. However, the portion of the reclamation immediately adjacent to Mei Foo was turned into a park -- the Laichikok Park. And throughout the year the park management periodically posts signs warning people to beware of possible snakes in the park.

J.B.: Somebody recently told me that Japanese dropped snakes in the New Territories by air from planes! I asked if they provided tiny parachutes for all the snakes...

K.D. Just a passing comment that the Japanese used Stonecutters for research with snakes. Actually what I've just typed was longer than the mention 😊

A.R.H : I'm sure there was a BBC documentary some years ago about the Island of Stone Cutters snake population.

K.D: .Great convo and at least confirmed that the 'great authority' wasn't just making stuff up as he went along (as usual), but had probably had heard an untrue story before about snakes from Stonecutters.

Cheers 😊

Note that I put the word "evidence" in quotation marks, meaning that I had doubts about some aspects of these stories. But they did lead me to wonder about a few things.

- 1) Although I know the population of snakes (or any living creatures) would eventually reach natural limits (and that's something I already understood prior to William Sargent's reminders), animal populations are not uniform in all places. There are variations in density. I understand Ireland and New Zealand have no snakes. That makes me wonder if some locations (esp. where populations can be contained, such as islands) might have greater densities than normal, and also if that might be affected by human import or breeding. And, if so, if the legends of Stonecutter's having abnormally large numbers of snakes (for whatever reason) might have some truth in them
- 2) 2) If some areas that are physically cut off from surrounding areas (such as islands) can have larger concentrations of snakes or of certain kinds of snakes, what is likely to happen if such areas then become joined to the surrounding areas.? BTW, although I have never seen any snakes (or "snake traces" or "snake-like objects") in Laichikok Park, I did once see a live snake in Mei Foo. I have no idea what kind it was. My memory says it was about a metre long, fairly slender (probably about 3 cm or less in diameter), and a fairly uniform dark grey in colour. It was during the time of the reclamation, and it made me wonder if we were going to have an influx of snakes from Stonecutter's. As far as I know, we don't have any snake restaurants in the area, though some people do keep exotic pets. We are also not too far from "Monkey Hill", where I have occasionally seen other

kinds of snakes.

W.S.: Its a nice story, but totally untrue that snake density would have anything to do with released snakes. They need to eat/drink/hide/mate same as any natural population of snake and the resource limit of the island would be reached by the natural population very quickly. If a pile of native snakes were released, they would soon die-out.

S.M.: I heard this story too but I'd heard Lamma was where the Japanese released everything before they left!! It's a great story but I've always put it in the category of 'Urban Myth'. 😊

The Mystery of Hollowcombe Bottom: A Dartmoor Enigma

Marc Raines

A Dartmoor Enigma: Nestled in the heart of Dartmoor National Park lies Hollowcombe Bottom, a place that has captured the imagination of locals and visitors alike. Known for its serene beauty and the wild Dartmoor ponies that roam freely, this picturesque part of Devon is also the site of one of the most baffling mysteries in British folklore. In April 1977, a family out for a stroll in the park stumbled upon a chilling scene: around 15 Dartmoor ponies lay dead. The animals were found with broken limbs and bloodied flesh, and their bodies were said to decompose at an unnaturally fast rate¹. This tragic event has since been the subject of much speculation and numerous theories. Theories abound as to what caused this mass pony demise. Some suggest natural causes like parasites, lightning strikes, or flash floods. Others point to more sinister explanations such as satanic rituals². However, it's the extraterrestrial hypothesis that has gained the most traction among conspiracy theorists. According to this theory, a low-flying UFO created a vortex that led to the ponies' untimely end¹. The incident might have remained a local legend had it not been for John Wyse of the Torbay UFO group. In July 1977, he visited Hollowcombe Bottom armed with Geiger counters and metal detectors, searching for evidence of UFO activity. The story was catapulted into the national spotlight, with newspapers around the world reporting on the "horror from outer space" and the mysterious deaths of the ponies². Despite the various investigations and the passage of time, the Hollowcombe Bottom incident remains unresolved. It continues to intrigue and perplex those who hear of it, serving as a reminder of the enduring power of mystery in our lives. As you walk through the moors of Dartmoor, with the wind whispering through the grass and the ponies grazing peacefully, it's hard not to feel the pull of the unknown. Hollowcombe Bottom, with its eerie past and unresolved questions, stands as a testament to the mysteries that still lie hidden

in the English countryside. For those who seek the thrill of the unexplained, Hollowcombe Bottom is a must-visit. It's a place where nature's beauty intertwines with the mysteries of the universe, inviting us to ponder the many enigmas that remain just beyond our understanding. --- Hollowcombe Bottom remains a captivating destination for those drawn to the peculiar and the unexplained. Whether you're a nature lover, a history buff, or a seeker of mysteries, this corner of Dartmoor offers an experience that is as haunting as it is beautiful. So, pack your waterproofs, grab a compass, and set out to explore the enigmatic Hollowcombe Bottom – who knows what you might discover?

Source: Conversation with Bing, 15/04/2024 (1) Hollowcombe Bottom – Devon, England - Atlas Obscura. <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/hollowcombe-bottom>.

- (2) [Unexplained Phenomena] Hollowcombe Bottom: What killed a herd of https://www.reddit.com/r/UnresolvedMysteries/comments/6lm5hw/unexplained_phenomena_hollowcombe_bottom_what/.
- (3) Hollowcombe Bottom, West Devon - area information, map ... - GetOutside. <https://getoutside.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/local/hollowcombe-bottom-west-devon>.

Mongolian Lake Monsters

Tabitca Cope

Crypto-ossity blog January 21st 2024

Mongolian Lake creatures

Several lakes are said to have lake monsters dwelling in them in Mongolian.

Lake Hovsgol

Thought to be between two to five million years old, Lake Hovsgol in northern Mongolia is the home of a large creature..It is Mongolia's largest freshwater lake, with depths of over 800 feet. The lake drains via the Egiyn River, which feeds the Selenge River in the Lake Baikal drainage basin.

Lake Baikal has its own monster. See link below.

<https://cryptozoo-ossity.blogspot.com/2021/03/mysterious-lake-baikal.html>

South of the lake lies the Hövsgöl Mountain Range. In October 2007 a report appeared in some Chinese newspapers. Diver Dave Woodward and sonar operator Gregg Mikolasek were boating on Lake Hovsgol when they saw a giant 'trace', or shape, suspended about 35 metres below the surface in the freshwater lake..

'I think we saw something and I think it was about six metres long,' Woodward recalls telling his diving buddies back at the camp later that afternoon. About three metres wide in the middle, whatever was down there exhibited the half-moon shape typical of the image of a fish on sonar. Its thick central section glowed red, indicating density, another pointer that whatever it was, it was probably a single entity and not a school of fish. Woodward thought about going in, hesitated, then decided not to.

(I cannot show the link to the newspaper articles as it contains a virus.)

It sounds typical of a lake creature description . I was unable to access other reports.

Could the creature be the same one as in Lake Baikal perhaps travelling from one lake to another.

Lake Uureg.

The Lake is a saline lake in western Mongolia. It has a maximum depth of 42 m (138 ft).

A Mongolian traveller saw a huge creature, which he captured on video whilst he was taking a trip around Uureg Lake .Traveller Mr S. Sodnomdorj said “Foremost I thought there was a timber floating on the lake. Then I asked from a local man who was joining with me if it was possible or not. The local said ‘It is not possible’. We were in the distance of 250 meters away from the object. After that I tried to see that thing carefully, and then it seemed like an animal. I switched on my camera and started to record. I was running to the lake while recording because it was too far to capture it. That animal began to move its body and turned to the centre of the lake. Finally I realized it was an animal”.The creature’s fin appeared on the surface of the lake and it was approximately 7-8 meters.

Local people tell of a myth about a giant creature in the Uureg Lake. They call the giant creature “Khukh bukh” (Blue bull).It is said to moo like a bull and appear once in 60 years. Elderly people used to say “I will give you to ‘blue bull’, if you behave naughtily” to children. They also used to warn people not to swim in the lake.Mr. Sodnomdorj who captured the creature wants to have the video analysed to prove if it is a creature or not.

As it is a salt water lake it could be a sea creature that somehow entered the lake.

Near by is another lake with a creature. Uureg Lake lies a 150 kilometers from the Khyargas Lake.

Khyargas Lake.

This is also a salt water lake and is 50 metres(150 metres approx) in depth

There was news released about Russian researchers working on a mysterious trace that was on the lake shore. A group of Mongolian and Russian geological researchers team led by Victor Yarmoluk, discovered a huge trace on the shore of the Khyargas lake in the 1980's. ([Voice of Russia Aug 31, 2013](#)).

The researchers discovered several newly made footprints on the shore 1.5 km (5 feet approx) from the lake. It seemed like many reptiles came out and were lying on the shore for some time.

Writer and public figure Igor Grishin and a team visited Khyargas Lake in 2013 for a second time. They visited the lake first time in 2010.

“We found different sizes of traces and also bones which are cannot belong to the animals in Mongolia. However fishes that bitten by big teeth were caught from the lake many times, but there is only a species called ‘toothless Osman of Altai’ exists in the lake as known. We afforded the observation of the footprints on the ground and bed of the lake with echometer. Those footprints can be divided into 3 groups. There can be different sizes of several animals or those footprints can be traces from different parts of one animal.”

Researchers found out that some prehistoric animals such as plesiosaurs were not able to digest its food unless to swallow stones.

Valery Nikolayev is a zoologist and scientist of Valdai protected area. He stated that he agrees the prediction on existence of the prehistoric giant reptiles The Uureg Lake belongs to the same region of geography. It raises the assumption of existence of the similar giant creatures in both lakes or travelling from one lake to another.

Lake Kanas

Kanas Lake means 'a gorgeous and mysterious lake' in Mongolian. Local legend has it that there is a huge 'lake monster' in the lake, which often drags horses drinking by the lake into the water.

Read more here:

<https://cryptozoo-oscity.blogspot.com/2009/07/kanas-lake-monster->

Lake Khaiyr

Its depth is yet unknown. It is called "Khaiyr" (meaning "to love" in modern Mongolian)

In 1940 there was a sighting of "two large black creatures" by the polar aviator, Ivan Cherevichny and a polar helmsman Valentin Ivanovich Akkuratov. They saw two large animals when flying over the lake at the height of 800–1000 metres. Getting curious, they got down to 50 metres and observed the animals, but the noise of the plane scared the creatures and they submerged.

In 1964 when a group of scientists from Moscow University, claim to have encountered an animal with prehistoric biology whilst on an expedition surveying mineral deposits. An article written in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* by G. Rokosuev explains that the "monster" was initially seen by N. Gladkikh, the deputy leader of the expedition team. Gladkikh went out to the lake to draw water and saw a creature that had crawled out onto the shore, apparently to eat the grass - a small head on a long gleaming neck, a huge body covered with jet-black skin and a vertical fin along the spine. Gladkikh's story was at first met with incredulity by the rest of the team. However, the creature then reappeared to be seen by the leader of the expedition and several other members.

Rokosuev wrote:

“Suddenly a head appeared in the lake, then a dorsal fin. The creature beat the water with its long tail, producing waves on the lake. You can imagine when we saw with our own eyes that the stories were true”

The descriptions sound like a plesiosaur, which became extinct 66 million years ago. Some researchers think that this creature represents a mammalian herbivore related to the hippopotamus. Due to the isolation of this northern lake, a unique adaptation could arise.

The 1964 story has since been reported as a hoax however the 1940 sighting has not been debunked.

Being so isolated it needs an expedition of neutral scientists to get to the truth.

It seems Scotland is not the only country with lots of lake monsters or water kelpies .Interestingly both are in the northern hemisphere.

Notes & Queries



Duck with a crossbow bolt in head

Sunday Telegraph

April 14th 2024

Duck with crossbow bolt in head still alive two years on

“ A Duck with a crossbow bolt lodged in its head is still alive two years after it was dealt the potentially fatal wound. The male mallard, which lives on a lake in Telford, Shropshire, is able to eat, swim and fly despite the three-inch bolt going through its head...Mark Bolt its (i.e. Cuan Wildlife Rescue) assistant manager, told *The Telegraph* that the duck—named by locals as Barney—is in good health and has been seen feeding, flying, swimming and even fighting other males...”

Hedgehog the size of a football

Creature with balloon syndrome spotted from passing bus in Gloucestershire is in charity's care and has been named Bounce

The Guardian online April 19th 2024

A hedgehog that had swollen to the size of a football – so big that it was spotted in a field by a passenger on a passing bus – has been deflated by rescuers.

The female hedgehog, which has been named Bounce, had blown up to twice its normal size when it was seen in Gloucestershire.

It was taken to the charity Wild Hogs Hedgehog Rescue and diagnosed with balloon syndrome, where air gets into a gap between the skin and the creature's muscular-skeletal structure.

New species of crab discovered in South China Sea

Miami Herald online May 14th 2023

Thanks to Shane Lea

Scientists in a submarine in the South China Sea found a “large” animal with “blade-like” claws and discovered a new species, a study said...Scientists boarded a submersible and plunged into the depths of the South China Sea. Thousands of feet below the surface, they encountered a “large” spine-covered creature. It turned out to be a new species. Researchers explored the South China Sea through a series of dives on a manned submersible in March 2021, according to a study published May 3 in the peer-reviewed journal *Raffles Bulletin of Zoology*. During one of these dives, researchers found a “large” crab on some coral and captured it, the study said. Back on the surface, they took a closer look at the deep-sea animal and realized they’d discovered a new species: *Gordonopsis mazupo*, or Mazu’s porter crab.

A photo from a Japanese archive showing two peculiar bear-like animals but note the badger-like head



Photo from web site titled Old Chinese photos of bizarre events.

I will attempt to render the poor English accompanying the above photo into understandable English: “ From the Japanese explanation we can see that there were animal specimens, one two hundred and fifty-five centimetres long next to a larger one, two hundred and sixty-two centimetres long.” The location is the Qingning Palace. (This is also known as the Mukden Palace in the city of Shenyang in Liaoning Province) The above photo was taken in 1925. The Japanese occupied Mukden in 1905.

Eagle-like bird in County Wexford

New Ross Standard November 1st 1974

STRANGE BIRD

On Saturday morning a strange bird alighted on the roof top of Paddy Reville's house in Ballycullane. The bird resembled an eagle, but much smaller. Its plumage was greyish but varied in colour in both sides. The bird was exhausted and after a short rest took flight in a north-westerly direction.

New species of spider discovered in Cornwall

BBC.co.uk

John Danks and Georgina Barnes

May 3rd 2024

A species of spider, previously unknown to science, has been found in the grounds of a university campus in Cornwall.

The small jumping arachnid was discovered in 2023 during an annual nature survey to find and identify different species on the University of Exeter's Penryn campus.

The University said several of the new species were collected and deemed "unlikely to be a Cornish native" - specimens were then sent to a spider expert at Manchester Museum, who confirmed they matched nothing in Europe.

Giant spider in Canada

From Strange Creatures Seldom Seen

John Warms

This is a spider I overlooked whilst researching for my essay with Shane Lea published in Flying Snake # 28., Mystery Giant Spiders of the World:

“A man from Berens River told me that he was going to set a trap for otter in a big crack in a rock, but changed his mind when he saw a huge black spider-like creature there that he thought might attack him. Its long legs were thicker than a man’s thumb , and its eyes were as big as quarters. The body size was about a foot in diameter - not counting the legs, and it was “hairy like a monkey” Its foot long tail was about an inch thick. When it stood up on its long legs, it was about a foot high. I heard only one other rumor regarding such spiders in all my travels. “ From Strange Things Seldom Seen by John Warms

Flying Snakes in Wales

Thanks to Bob Skinner

From Forteanexchange@groups.io May 25th 2024

Some time ago in this parish we had some discussion of flying snakes. Quite by chance I came upon the following today in a footnote to Welsh folklore. The author - John Ryhs - gives some folkloric context then ends with a 'fortean' note on what seems to be a 'real life' observation. Of course, despite the association of 'wings' with flying, the observed snakes may have developed leaping to progress through or over the dense gorse.

in 'Additions and Corrections' on p.164 (begins p163)

"Owen's Welsh Folk-Lore, p. 349, [notes] that 'traditions of flying snakes were once common in all parts of Wales,' and adds as follows:—'The traditional origin of these imaginary creatures was that they were snakes, which by having drunk the milk of a woman, and by having eaten of bread consecrated for the Holy Communion, became transformed into winged serpents or dragons.' The other is to the Brython for 1861, p. 190, where one reads in Welsh to the following effect:—'If a snake chances to have an opportunity to drink of a woman's milk it is certain to become a gwiber. When a woman happens to be far from her child, and her breasts are full and beginning to give her pain, she sometimes milks them on the ground in order to ease them. To this the peasantry in parts of Cardiganshire have a strong objection, lest a snake should come there and drink the milk, and so become a gwiber.' The word gwiber is used in the Welsh Bible for a viper, but the editor of the Brython explains, that in our folklore it means a huge kind of snake or dragon that has grown wings and has its body cased in hard scales: for a noted instance in point he refers the reader to the first number of the Brython, p. 3. It is believed still all over Wales that snakes may, under favourable circumstances, develop wings: in fact, an Anglesey man strongly wished, to my knowledge, to offer to the recent Welsh Land Commission, as evidence of the wild and neglected state of a certain farm, that the gorse had grown so high and the snakes so thriven in it that he had actually seen one of the latter flying right across a wide road which separated two such gorse forests as he described: surprised and hurt to find that this was not accepted, he inferred that the Commissioners knew next to nothing about their business."

Art by Loes Modderman



Above: Black dog of Bungay

Below: Nessie



More Art by Loes Modderman



Above: Kraken

Below: Tatzelwurm



Below: Unicorn Maiden

